The Preacher as Man of Letters

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CHAPTER I

BOOKS AND THE PREACHER

I

LEST any one suppose that I presume to stand here as "a man of letters," let me at once disavow any title to that description —unless, indeed, I may, by grace of a saying of Jesus, lay such claim to it as many of you may. "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." He who gives bed and board to a prophet just because he is a prophet, and without any other reason, shows the kind of company he likes to keep. Very well, says Jesus, count him also among the prophets. If delight in letters and in communion with men of letters through their books be the passport, then I think that I may claim an humble place on the outer fringe of the company. I was fortunate in being brought up among books: and books have been my pleasure ever since.

There is, however, an important sense in which the preacher may be spoken of as a man of letters. We preachers are users of language. It belongs to our calling that we use the English language in public, and most of us, in view of such public speech, put down in writing what we intend to say. So far, then, we are engaged in the production of literature. This may strike you as a faintly amusing remark. The sermon is not now regarded as serious literature, and volumes of sermons are very far out of fashion. But there was a time when it was otherwise. Here, to prove it, is a passage from Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson:* "Mr. Beauclerk's great library was this season sold in London by auction. Mr. Wilkes said he wondered to find in it such a numerous collection of sermons, seeming to think it strange that a gentleman of Mr. Beauclerk's character in the gay world should have chosen to have many compositions of that kind. *Johnson:* Why, Sir, you are to consider that sermons make a considerable branch of English literature: so that a library must be very imperfect, if

it has not a numerous collection of sermons." Here and there in Boswell you will find evidence that in those days sermons and their preachers were taken very seriously, and that Doctor Johnson had much to say of the matter and manner of contemporary preachers, John Wesley and George Whitefield among them. Upon this subject I shall have something to say at a later stage. Here I shall only say that since we have to use the English language as an instrument, we should be able to use it well; and a sermon is none the worse for being good reading as well as good hearing. It is not, therefore, beside the point that we should, in some minor though quite real fashion, conceive ourselves as men of letters, thereby incurring the obligations and, also enjoying the high privileges of that dignity.

It is not impertinent to remind you that our calling holds a respectable place in the tradition of English letters. I need but to mention the names of John Donne, Robert Herrick, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, John Bunyan, Thomas Traherne, Isaac

Watts, Thomas Fuller, Richard Hooker, John Henry Newman, Sydney Smith, Dean Swift, Charles Kingsley, Ralph Waldo Emerson and T. E. Brown to prove that there is no incongruity in speaking of the preacher as a man of letters. Even Samuel Taylor Coleridge was for a short time a preacher (have we not a report of one of his sermons from no less a hand than that of William Hazlitt?). Though we may blush somewhat for Laurence Sterne's ambiguous record in the church, his name cannot be excluded from our list. It is clear not only that the preacher may regard himself as a man of letters in a modest way of business, but that he need not regard his calling as excluding him from distinction in literature.

Just here I cannot forbear from a word about the Rev. Alexander Grosart, M.A., minister of Saint George's Presbyterian Church in Blackburn, England. He was in charge of that congregation from 1868 to 1892, a period of twenty-four years. During that time he built up a strong and active people and erected a church build-

ing. He was assiduous and faithful in his pastoral duty. At the same time he began and carried through a momentous literary undertaking—the editing and the publishing of reprints of rare Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, as well as the works of some of the Puritan writers. He brought out thirty-nine volumes of the Fuller Worthies' Library, thirty-nine volumes of a series called "Occasional Issues of Unique and Rare Books," fourteen volumes of the Chertsey Worthies' Library, thirty-three volumes of the Huth Library, and ten volumes of the works of Edmund Spenser. By this work he added a great deal to our knowledge of English literature and its growth; and to his industry we owe our possession of many important writings, of which, but for him, we might be still ignorant. When we remember that he traveled not only over Great Britain but through all the important countries of Europe, searching libraries for old and forgotten English texts, that he collected the subscriptions which made possible the publication of these works, and that with all this he

did not neglect his pulpit or his pastoral duty, and even found time to write a few small devotional works, we have a record of industry which should make most of us blush, who are so loud in our complaints of the volume of our business and the brevity of the week. That Grosart was a better collector than critic is certainly true; but we may none the less say that our calling is honored by his extraordinary achievement.

2

My childhood was spent among a folk who were deeply versed in theology; and theological controversy was one of their principal recreations. Of these jousts I can still recall not a few. There was, however, one debate which was never for long silent—the perennial duel of Baptist and Pædobaptist. The argument usually arose in the dressing-sheds of the slate quarries and then flowed over into the columns of the little local weekly sheet. It was so that I made my first wondering acquaintance with the Greek language. In spite

of my years, I was deeply committed to the Pædobaptist cause and followed its fortunes with alternate fear and hope. The battle having passed from the quarry to the press, the heavy guns—the ministers of the community—came into action. One week there was much ado about two words (printed in italics) *bapto* and *baptizo;* and a great deal was made of the difference between them. They were said to be Greek; and I was somewhat astonished to discover that in order to ascertain their proper meaning, appeal had to be made to persons named Plato, Polybius, Herodotus, and others. It struck me as a queer thing that both parties appealed to the Bible for support, and yet had to go outside the Bible in order to discover what the Bible was saying. Both sides agreed that the Bible was inspired and infallible; yet when its meaning was in question, resort was had to other books which were considered neither inspired nor infallible. It was very puzzling.

My troubles passed away with the years. I came to understand that words must have

the same essential meaning whether they be inspired or uninspired. Otherwise, inspiration only brings confusion to simple minds and revelation becomes mystification. If there was any doubt about the precise difference between *bapto* and *baptizo,* it was right to go to Homer or Sophocles to discover what they had to say about it. In the same way, it was right to go to Tacitus or Josephus to inquire if they had any light to throw on some historical points in the Bible that are not clear; and it was right to go to Plato and Philo in order to clarify the meaning of some philosophical ideas and terms that had found their way into the New Testament.

I was, you will perceive, making for myself an important discovery, namely, that the Bible had a context; and that in order to understand it, one had to read it in its context. The name of this context, in the large, is Literature. The Bible does not stand in remote isolation; it is territory bounded on all sides by countries with which it has endless commerce. I would not, however, have you suppose that when

I speak of literature as the context of the Bible, I am thinking merely of the linguistic, historical, and philosophical connections between the two. The matter goes much deeper; and I can best illustrate what I have in mind by reminding you of Newman's definition of literature: "Man is composed of body and soul: he thinks and he acts; he has appetites, passions, affections, motives, designs; he has within him the lifelong struggle of duty with inclination; he has an intellect fertile and capacious; he is formed for society, and society multiplies and diversifies in endless combinations his personal characteristics, moral and intellectual. All this constitutes his *life*. Of all this literature is the expression; so that literature is to man in some sort what autobiography is to the individual. It is his Life and Remains." Newman adds (with needless stress, I think) that literature is the autobiography of the *natural* man, in order to make clear its distinction from Sacred Letters. To this point, with some special reference to the Bible, I shall have occasion to call attention at a later

stage. For the moment I am concerned only to point out the continuity of the Christian Scriptures with the rest of the world of letters and to insist that the sufficient understanding of the Scriptures does to no inconsiderable extent depend upon the light which literature is able to direct upon them.

Literature, then, is the record of man as he is in this world, in his strivings and his longings, in his loves and his hates, in his hopes and in his fears, at his best and at his worst, of man in his strength and in his weakness, in the heights and in the depths; and it is with this man that we, as preachers, have to do. It is to him that we have to speak. While it is true that mere book knowledge of men is vain except it go hand in hand with intimate living intercourse with men, it is no less true that the necessarily limited knowledge of human nature which you and I can gather single-handed is enriched and interpreted by the knowledge of man that has been stored up through the centuries and preserved in the literature of the world. It is the custom

in some universities to speak of the Greek and Latin Classics as *litteræ humaniores,* humane letters. But all living literature, whatever age bore it, is entitled to that description. Literature is the self-revelation of man; and I suggest that you and I must fall short of the height of our ministry if we have not dug with some diligence in this rich and rewarding quarry.

3

Do not, however, suppose that I am recommending the study of general literature to you as a sort of professional duty or as a means of professional advantage. Nothing is further from my mind; and it is of the greatest importance not to compromise our approach to literature by making it a professional affair. The man who reads a book with a homiletic eye will infallibly miss the point of it. He may get what he wants out of it, but not what the book intended to tell him. This is not to say that a man in his reading may not make a note, as he goes along, of a memorable sentence, a startling phrase, or an apt

simile; he is entitled to do that; I will go so far as to say that he is foolish if he does not. But no man has a right to look upon a book as a storehouse of grist for his pulpit. He is doing injustice to the book and injury to himself. Many years ago it fell to me to take a small part in a meeting at which Mr. Bernard Shaw was the principal speaker. By great good fortune I was seated next to Mr. Shaw on the platform, and in an interval of the meeting he engaged me in conversation. The course of what passed between us does not concern us here; but it lives very vividly in my mind by reason of a remark Mr. Shaw made. Why, he asked, can't people let the Bible tell them its own story? Unfortunately, we have still to ask that question, for there are those who silence the authentic word of the Bible by reading into it their own predilections, using it to prove a case. But Mr. Shaw's question implies the rule for all our reading of great literature. We should let the book tell its own story; and we preachers most of all. For we are fools when we risk the loss of a quickening

word to our souls for the sake of a little homiletic raw material.

Not, indeed, that what we read is profitless for our preaching. You will find much that returns to you after many days—a happy phrase, a striking image, a penetrating reflection will often rise out of memory as you sit at your desk in travail with a sermon. But the larger advantage of your traffic with great literature will lie in what it does for *you*. If you do your part aright, it will give you depth of insight and breadth of outlook; it will enhance your sensibility to the finer issues and the rarer values of life; it will enlarge your sympathies and teach you tolerance and forbearance, both with opinions and tastes that differ from your own, and with the faults and foibles of your fellows. It will induce in you a profound sense of the dignity and worth of man and of his boundless possibilities; it will quicken in you that humanism, that passion for man as man, which next to faith in God, was the secret of the grace and the power of Jesus Christ. Having such a treasure—even though it be in earthly ves-

sels—you will, provided the word of God be already in your mind and in your mouth, utter yourself not unworthily of your high calling. But let me repeat, this will happen to you only as you let whatever book you have in your hand tell its own story.

4

We have sailed on thus far without any forecast of the course of our voyage. My business is to pass on to you what scarce wisdom I may have gathered concerning the relation of the preacher to general literature. There is a sense in which general literature can do nothing for the preacher which it does not do for other men who take it seriously and lovingly. It is probably true that we ministers are prone to neglect what I may call general reading, and to confine ourselves to theology and other special subjects that seem to have a more immediate bearing on our task. This is not to be wondered at nowadays, when physical science, psychology and sociology are all clamoring for our attention. We must read our Ed-

dington, our Whitehead, our Dewey; and it is very right and necessary that we should. Besides these, there are new voices within the field of religion bringing in authentic news; and to these also we must lend an ear. But there is a danger here of which we should be wary. It is the danger of foreshortening our vision, of living exclusively in the shop and losing distance from the picture. The result of too exclusive preoccupation with a single subject and its nearer accessories is to make our minds stuffy; and its further consequence is to detach the subject from the issues of life. It is necessary to leave the shop and take a walk up the street if we are to retain a proper balance and to see our subject and our task in a true perspective; and the best street in which a minister can take his walks abroad is the wide and variegated highway that we call literature. I should suggest that for every theological or professional book we read, we should read at least two books of more general intention.

It becomes my business, then, to commend that highway and to indicate whom and

what we may expect to meet in the way. Clearly, within the limits assigned to us, we can only take a very rough and cursory survey of the rich and extensive thoroughfare which lies before us. In any case, none of us can ever hope to become familiar with all the notable figures who adorn our street; nor, indeed, is that necessary. Reading maketh a full man, said Lord Bacon. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has added the very necessary warning that too much reading will make a man too full; and he has added to his warning, by way of encouragement, a quotation from an old schoolmaster which I will venture to purloin for your sakes: "I believe if the truth were known, men would be astonished at the small amount of learning with which a high degree of culture is compatible. In a moment of enthusiasm, I ventured once to tell my 'English set' that if they could really master the ninth book of *Paradise Lost* so as to rise to the height of its great argument and incorporate all its beauties in themselves, they would at one blow, by virtue of that alone, become highly cultivated

men. More and more various learning might raise them to the same height by different paths, but could hardly raise them higher."[1] To this, I will add for your comfort a passage from that accomplished writer, C. E. Montague. "Some of us," he says, "are going up and down this well-read world with literary luggage so meager that it is hardly worth putting on the rack, not to speak of the van. Scarcely a day passes over our heads on which no eye of scorn has fallen on some detail or other of our literary destitution. The talk turns to Southey, or Landor, De Quincey, or Peacock, Goethe or Schiller, Ariosto or Dante, Rabelais or Corneille, the *Faerie Queene,* or *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Then it all comes out. Not one of them have we read. And then the lips of the tactful are almost imperceptibly closed, and those of the less tactful are balefully opened. Perhaps someone addicted to a sort of slum research goes on to question us further, so as to find whether our ignorance is absolutely exhaustive. I have had my depths plumbed and dredged in this manner for traces of some

acquaintance with Gibbon or with Roger Ascham, Stendhal or Balzac, Sir Edwin Arnold or Sir Thomas More. High and low, the inquisitors have rummaged the pockets of my mind. Had I read *Urn Burial?* Did I know my *Hudibras?* The good men might have fished all night; they would have caught nothing in me. With none of those august authors had I so much as a nodding acquaintance. Darkest England surpassed herself in my poor person."[2] Having Montague's distinction in mind, we should not have to search for the moral. It is better to be well read than to be widely read.

There is indeed no great need to warn the average minister against too much reading, though there is no doubt here and there a man who reads too much and thinks too little. We are in a calling in which a man, if he have even the rudiments of a conscience, never overtakes his arrears, never goes to bed with the happy sense that he has done that day all the things he should have done. We shall be under no temptation to read too much, for time and oppor-

tunity are lacking. Even then, what we read should be limited by our digestive power. For reading without due reflection and assimilation is hardly to be called reading at all.

The moral of all this is that we should select our reading; and for that we require a principle of selection. To this matter we shall need to address ourselves later on. I allude to it now in passing because it belongs to my purpose here to indicate to you how wide is the ground of choice. In one of his essays, Sainte-Beuve pictures the heaven to which great writers go. After premising that he would desire not to exclude any among the worthy "from Shakespeare, the freest of creative geniuses and the greatest of all the classics without knowing it," down to the least, he goes on to tell us who are there: "Homer as always and everywhere should be first, likest a God; but behind him, like the procession of the three wise kings of the East, would be seen the three great poets, the three Homers, so long ignored by us, who wrote epics for the use of the old peoples of Asia, the

poets Valmiki, Vyasa of the Hindus, and Firdousi of the Persians." The wise men and poets of old, "those who put human morality into maxims, and those who in simple fashion sang it, would converse together in *rare and gentle* speech and would not be surprised at understanding each other's meaning at the first word. Solon, Hesiod, Theognis, Job, Solomon—and why not Confucius?—would welcome the clever moderns, La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère, who then listening to them would say, 'They knew all that we know and, in repeating life's experiences, we have discovered nothing.' On the hill most easily discernible and of most accessible ascent, Vergil, surrounded by Menander, Tibullus, Terence, Fénelon, would occupy himself in discoursing with them with great charm and divine enchantment . . . . Not far from him, regretting separation from so dear a friend, Horace in his turn would preside (so far as so wise a poet could preside) over the group of poets of social life who could talk although they sang, Pope, Boileau-Despréaux, the one become less

irritable, the other less faultfinding. Montaigne, a true poet, would be among them. . . . There would La Fontaine forget himself, and becoming less volatile, would wander no more. Voltaire would be attracted to it, but while finding pleasure in it would not have patience to remain. A little lower down on the same hill as Vergil, Xenophon with simple bearing, looking in no way like a general, but, rather, resembling a priest of the Muses, would be seen gathering around him the Attics of every tongue and of every nation, the Addisons, the Pellissons, the Vauvenargues—all who feel the value of an easy persuasiveness, an exquisite simplicity and a gentle negligence mingled with ornament. In the center of the place, in the portico of the principal temple, three great men would like to meet often, and when they were together no fourth, however great, would dream of joining their discourse or their silence. In them would be seen beauty, proportion in greatness, and that perfect harmony which appears but once in the full youth of the world. Their three names

have become the ideal of art—Plato, Sophocles, and Demosthenes. These demigods honored, we see a numerous and familiar company of choice spirits who follow, the Cervantes and Molières, practical painters of life, indulgent friends who are still the first of benefactors, who laughingly embrace all mankind, turn man's experience to gayety and know the powerful workings of a sensible, hearty, and legitimate joy. In the Middle Ages, believe me, Dante would occupy the sacred heights; at the feet of the singer of paradise all Italy would be spread out like a garden. Boccaccio and Ariosto would there disport themselves; and Tasso would again find the orange groves of Sorrento!"

A man had need of many lives, had he a mind to explore at large this vast and varied paradise. But such toil were superfluous. It is not necessary to become familiar with all its citizens in order to gain the franchise of this wonderland. It is enough to be on intimate and friendly terms with a few; and those few chiefly of one's own blood and speech. "Our circumstances,"

says Newman, "such as locality, period, language, seem to make little or no difference to the character of literature as such. On the whole, all literatures are one." It is certainly true that if an Englishman had sat down to give his report of the literary paradise, it would not be much different from that of Sainte-Beuve. A few more English names there would doubtless be in the catalogue, and not so many French. A Scotsman would not be happy without the inclusion of Sir Walter Scott and Robert Burns; and I, a Welshman, could mention a name or so, unknown to you, yet not undeserving of a respectable place in the company. But in the main all literature is one; and it is not necessary that a man should know all that has ever been written—even if he could—in order to apprehend the one heart that beats and the one soul that kindles in all its parts.

Now, a man will go naturally into this wide demesne by the gate that is nearest to him. He will begin with those of his own tongue. Well for him if he be master of other tongues that will open other doors.

Some knowledge of another literature is indeed necessary if one is to do full justice to the quality and distinction of his own; and no less necessary to save him from the perils of insularity. I had the good fortune to be brought up bilingually; and the comparison of English and Welsh literature has meant something to my appreciation of both. The tradition has passed away by which men of our calling were expected as a matter of course to be at home in the classical literatures of Greece and Rome; and that I take to be a serious impoverishment. Even those of us who were reasonably well drilled in Greek and Latin have in the press of our daily task allowed our faculty in these tongues to fall into disrepair; and "the glory that was Greece" and "the grandeur that was Rome" are, alas! grown dim in our eyes. Nevertheless, there are translations of the classics and of other literatures which at least may kindle in us some sense of those ancient glories and of others nearer to us; and the preacher who out of his penury invests now and again in a Gilbert Murray or a Loeb trans-

lation shall not lose his reward. If one has also a modern language besides his own at his command, so much the better. But even then he will generally find his chief delight and his largest advantage in the literature written in the tongue wherein he was born.

Our study will chiefly direct itself to English literature. If any of you, being good Americans, cavil at this word "English," let me hasten to reassure you with Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's definition of English literature: "English literature is that which sundry men and women have written in English about life, no matter where it was written. If it be written memorably in the English language, it is English literature." I have a recollection of a discussion once afoot in these United States concerning the development of a distinctive American literature; and in Canada we have a periodic debate about the creation of a distinctive Canadian literature. But when we persuade American writers to be self-consciouly American and Canadian writers to be self-consciously Canadian, the likelihood

is that they will not bring forth literature at all. We shall be wise to encourage them, whether in the United States or in Canada, to write memorably about life; and the special American note and the distinctive Canadian quality will take good care of themselves. But American literature and Canadian literature no less than British literature will continue to be provinces within the commonwealth of English letters. It may be that the natural influences that make for variation of species will some day bring forth an American language and a Canadian language, though for my part, I greatly doubt it. So long as the Authorized Version of the Bible and Shakespeare are current among those peoples who to-day speak the English language, they will continue to speak the same tongue, whatever minor variations of speech may follow from the differing circumstances of their life; and whatever literature they may produce will still be English literature. When, therefore, I speak of English literature, I am thinking of a body of writing which includes both Hazlitt and Emerson, both

Richard Jeffries and Thoreau, both Mrs. Browning and Emily Dickinson, both Sir Walter Scott and Herman Melville.

If any of you suppose that by confining our present attention largely to English literature I am presenting a too narrow field for our study, let me remind you of what I have already said of the unity of all literature. But I would like to point out that this unity is not merely an affair of (shall I say?) psychological affinity within the writing brotherhood of all ages and tongues. There is also a profound mutual indebtedness as between literatures. For one thing, books written in one language have been translated and incorporated into the literature of another. The work of Cervantes is Spanish literature; but Shelton's translation of *Don Quixote* is English literature and has been included by a fastidious publishing house in a series of English classics. The successful grafting of one literature on another in this fashion requires that what has been memorably written shall also be memorably translated. Nobody would deny the 1611 version of the English Bible to be

authentic literature; and that is a translation from two languages. But what a translation! Of the miracle of that translation let a professor of English literature testify: "That a committee of forty-seven (not one of them, as the professor has already observed, known, outside this performance, for any superlative talent) should have gone steadily through the mass of Holy Writ, seldom interfering with genius, yet when interfering, seldom missing to improve, should have captured (or even, let us say, refined or improved) a rhythm so personal, so constant, that our Bible has the voice of one author speaking through its many mouths—that, gentlemen, is a wonder before which I can only stand humble and aghast."

There is another way than translation in which literatures enrich each other. I select two instances that by their magnitude should be sufficient to illustrate the point. Shakespeare went far afield from Britain and the British for the plots of his plays. He found them—at first or second hand—in Plautus, Ariosto, the Gesta Romanorum,

Boccaccio, Plutarch, Saxo Grammaticus, Cinthio, and Lucian. It has been said that the plot of *The Tempest* had its origins in the work of a Spanish novelist, a German play, and English tracts on the discovery of the Bermuda Islands. As for Milton, Mark Pattison tells us of an early common-place book in which the poet had made extracts from about eighty different authors, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, and English. Of Greek authors no less than sixteen are quoted; and we know that Milton was well versed in Dante and Petrarch, Tasso and Ariosto. The figure of Satan which is the *chef d'œuvre* of Milton's genius in *Paradise Lost* owes something to a Dutch drama *Lucifer,* by Joost van der Vondel.

Nor is it only in regard to the *matter* of literature that this traffic of give-and-take goes on. The forms of English literature have been very deeply influenced by classical and foreign models. This is largely a technical matter into which it would be irrelevant to enter. Let me only refer you to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's lecture on "The Horatian Model in English Verse"

for a learned and informing discussion of one aspect of a large subject. And here let me say, once for all, this: I have already quoted or referred to Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch several times, and I shall do so again. In such a study as we have undertaken this is inevitable. Good wine needs no bush, and I am not here to praise Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. But I would be failing in my duty if I did not refer to the most stimulating and informing discussion of English letters in our time—the lectures delivered by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch from the chair of English literature at Cambridge University and published under the titles of *The Art of Reading, The Art of Writing,* and *Studies in Literature.* They are remarkable for the entire absence from them of a solemn and ponderous academic tone; and they are as delightful in their humor as they are substantial in their matter.

To resume, I was trying to show you that the study of English literature becomes itself an indirect study of all literature. For literatures have a way of enriching each

other, not merely in the obvious way I have mentioned, but in a hundred other more subtle ways. There is a wide incessant commerce of minds which transcends all frontiers, so wide and various that it is impossible to trace its infinite reticulation, and which reflects itself in every living literature. All literature is essentially catholic; and English literature not least so. The man who has reasonably wide and varied intimacy with English literature is possessed of all the elements of a universal culture. He is a citizen of the world of intelligence and taste.

5

In his lecture on "The Religion of a Man of Letters," Sir Gilbert Murray discusses the nature of religion: "Man is imprisoned in the external present; and what we call man's religion is, to a great extent, the thing that offers him a secret and permanent means of escape from that prison, a breaking of the prison walls which leaves him standing, of course, still in the present, but in a present so enlarged and enfran-

chised that it is become not a prison but a free world. Religion even in the narrow sense is always looking for *Soteria,* for escape, for some salvation from the terror to come or some deliverance from the body of this death."[3]

Not, I think, a very adequate account of religion; but let it pass. Where, then, does Sir Gilbert Murray find his escape? "A scholar, I think, secures his freedom by keeping hold always of the past and treasuring the best out of the past, so that in a present that may be angry and sordid he can call back memories of calm or of high passion; in a present that requires resignation or courage he can call back the spirit with which brave men long ago faced the same evils. He draws out of the past high thoughts and great emotions, he also draws the strength that comes from communion or brotherhood.

> 'Blind Thamyris and Blind Mæonides
> And Tiresias and Phineus, prophets old,'

come back to comfort another blind poet in his affliction. The Psalms, turned into

strange languages, their original meaning often lost, live on as a real influence in human life, a strong and almost always an ennobling influence. I know the figures in the tradition may be unreal, their words may be misinterpreted, but the communion is quite a real fact. And the student as he realises it feels himself one of a long line of torchbearers. He attains that which is the most compelling desire of every human being, a work in life that is worth living for, and which is not cut short by the accident of his own death."

Sir Gilbert Murray is one of the greatest living humanists; and he is to-day fighting the human battle on more than one front. Naturally, he turns to the great springs of humanism in the past to renew his strength in the intervals of this difficult and often discouraging warfare. He is entitled to call this religion, if he so chooses, for there is no constituted authority to deny him. For my own part, I cannot conceive of a religion which, though its terrestrial roots are in the historical past, is not more concerned with the future, which is indeed,

not less concerned with time itself than with eternity. Religion does offer an escape; but that escape is to enable us to shut out the press of affairs and look upon this human scene *sub specie æternitatis*. But this is a debate to which there is no end; and it is not for us here to pursue it. The definitions of religion are as many as the sands upon the seashore; and as various as the pebbles on the beach.

I have quoted these passages because I want in a modest and respectful way to turn the tables on Sir Gilbert Murray. I confess, if I may be bold enough to whisper it, that what he describes as the religion of a literary man reminds me somewhat of the busman's holiday. His profession and his religion lead the literary man through the same country. And here the man of religion is better off. The recourse to literature leads the preacher through a different landscape from that in which he does his daily duty; and that has its advantages.

You will not quarrel with me when I say that there are times when a preacher needs

an escape, not from religion, but from his preoccupation with the things of religion. His life is spent in the making and preaching of sermons, in all sorts of pastoral duties, in giving the dead a Christian burial and binding the living in Christian matrimony. And there is no doubt that he grows stale. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Was it not William James who spoke well of the idea of a "moral holiday"? I am not sure that I quite know what he meant. But the minister is well advised not to tread the mill too long without giving his mind a holiday from his professional religious duties. He can take the most refreshing and invigorating holiday in his own study and in a short time. Let him read one of the *Canterbury Tales,* or an essay or two from Charles Lamb, or take in his hand an anthology; and he will by that very change of scene come back to his task a fresher and a better man.

It would be very far from me to suggest that this is the minister's only antidote to fatigue and staleness. He has the incomparable resource of prayer; he may also

wait in quietness before the Eternal. And if he is too tired to pray, too strained to possess his soul in tranquillity, he may turn to *The Imitation* or to Thomas Traherne's *Centuries of Meditation,* and there walk in the veritable country of the soul. But there are times when it is well to have a complete change of scene. There are, for instance, those times when the minister's soul is weary of the astonishing pettiness that Christian folk can sometimes display. It is a curious circumstance that some people can be more touchy, more truculent, more censorious in their church relations than in any other part of their lives; and they make a good deal of trouble, the brunt of which falls on the minister. Well for him in those days if he can turn to his Horace, his Addison, his Thoreau, or his Christopher Morley to readjust his outlook. I remember reading long ago (in A. K. Boyd's *Recreations of a Country Parson,* I think) that a young minister would be wise to spend a good deal of his time in light reading. I cannot recall now the reason for this counsel, though I have some

impression that it had to do with delivering the preacher's pulpit diction from dullness and heaviness. But I am quite sure that the counsel is good on other grounds. It is a relief and an escape from the rough and unpleasant circumstances from which no minister is immune; and it gives him a certain detachment from the familiar scene and enables him to see the passing trouble in a juster proportion. This, I think, is particularly good counsel for ministers whose parishes make them too familiar with the more sordid aspects of life. I confess that what I have seen and do see of tragedy in the course of the day's work makes me turn reluctantly to the tragic in literature or drama. I prefer when I go to the theater to see a comedy, not merely because I enjoy the fun but because it supplies a correction which my soul needs. And all of us whose task, wherever it is set, is one of sustained seriousness, may find much wholesome holiday in turning to the great humorists, the Aristophaneses, the Molières, and others of the brotherhood down to our own day.

CHAPTER II

THE TREASURY OF ENGLISH PROSE

I

THAT the study of literature can do no more for the preacher than it may do for any other man I have already affirmed with sufficient emphasis. Nevertheless, the preacher has his own special interest in the matter in so much as he is constrained by his calling, week by week, to use the English language in public. Like M. Jourdain in Molière's play (who discovered it late in life), the preacher talks prose all week, but there are public occasions on which it is the preacher's duty to speak English prose as much like a master as he is capable of doing. Usually, he is obliged to write this prose before he utters it; and it is needful for him, as it is for the professional writer, to know what English prose has been and can be by the study of those

who, by common consent, are acknowledged to be masters of it. It is the business of those who use language in public, whether on the printed page or in the pulpit, so to use it that it serves its end.

Had we time to dwell on the technicalities of the subject, we should find much to interest us. You would, for instance, suppose it to be something of a waste of time to discuss elaborately the difference between prose and poetry. Everyone knows that, you would probably say. Here is a volume of Tennyson, and here is a volume of Thoreau. Open them; and your eyes will tell you a part of the difference. Read them aloud, and your ears will tell you the rest. But it is not quite so simple as that. Here is Mr. Herbert Read, in his book on *English Prose Style,* telling us that prose is "constructive expression," while poetry is "creative expression." By "creative" he means *original,* and by that he means that "the words are born and reborn in the act of thinking." But prose, that is, constructive expression, is "a structure of ready-made words." I am not sure that I quite

know what he means. His last word is that "the difference between poetry and prose is a qualitative difference that has its effects in expression; but these effects cannot be measured quantitatively but only by the exercise of an instinctive judgment" —which, I suspect, really means that he gives it up.

That is an attempt to state the difference between prose and poetry in terms of the process. The late Arthur Clutton Brock states it in terms of what we may describe as ethical tone. He says that while the cardinal virtue of poetry is love, that of prose is justice. "By justice," he continues, "I do not mean justice only to particular people or ideas, but a habit of justice in all the processes of thought, a style tranquillized and a form molded by that habit. The master of prose is not cold, but he will not let any word or image influence him with a heat irrelevant to his purpose." Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, commenting on this distinction, remarks that he would prefer to say that the cardinal virtue of poetry is a "high compelling emotion, however

widely interpreted," while the cardinal virtue of prose is "persuasion," whether it be in argument or in narrative. "Defoe's art," he argues (in telling of Crusoe's visit to the wreck), "is all bent on persuading you that it really happened, and *just so,* as Burke, in pleading for conciliation with the American colonies is bent upon marshaling argument upon argument why conciliation is expedient, besides being just. Persuasion is, after all, as Matthew Arnold says, the only true intellectual process; or as Socrates, in prison under a sentence of death for having failed in it, so nobly proclaimed it to be, the only right way of reforming a commonwealth." That word "persuasion" brings the matter near home to ourselves. For it is our calling to persuade and, if it may be, to convince. That is not preaching which is not preaching for a verdict.

I am inclined to leave the matter there, having no expert judgment of my own to offer. But I trust that even so much has served to show that there is more in prose than meets the casual eye and that one does

no manner of justice to it by casual reading. Let us content ourselves in the meantime with the less recondite definition that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch himself offers us: "We set a thing down in ink, we print it in a book, because we feel it to be memorable, to be worth preserving. But to set this memorable speech down, we must choose one of two forms, verse or prose; and I define verse to be a record in meter and rhythm, and prose to be a record, which dispensing with meter (abhorring it, indeed), uses rhythm laxly, preferring it to be various and unconstrained, so always that it convey a certain pleasure to the ear."

I desire here to make two observations. *First,* the ordinary reader hardly recognizes the rhythm of prose. I suspect him to be quite unaware of its existence. It is not likely, however, that you who, Sunday by Sunday, read the English Bible aloud in public have failed to discover the existence of prose rhythm. If you have failed, you convict yourself of an inattentive or an insensitive ear. It is one of the remarkable qualities of English prose that its rhythms

are so many and so varied. You may find a learned discussion of them in Professor Saintsbury's *History of English Prose Rhythm;* though for my part, I believe that since the possible permutations and combinations of accents and long and short syllables are pretty well endless, and the rhythm itself is so much a personal affair, that the attempt to reduce it to strict classification and rule will never achieve more than a partial success. A more interesting question is where the rhythm comes from. The only answer I can offer is that it comes from the nature of things. Life itself is an affair of rhythm; and rhythm in prose or verse or music is an echo of life.

The second observation has to do with the requirement that prose should be written so that it convey *a certain pleasure to the ear.* It is not necessary, indeed, to read our books aloud, though it is well to read aloud frequently, if only to keep ourselves mindful of the musical resources of English speech. Beethoven composed some of his mightiest music after he became deaf: and it is possible for us to hear *with our minds,*

as we read. It requires a little use, to be sure. But you would do well to read much aloud in order to feel and thereafter to transmit the pleasure which the hearing of well-constructed, well-spoken English can always give to the discriminating hearer (and it is to be remembered that a sermon is none the worse for falling happily on the ear). There is not only the pleasure of the rhythm but the ordering of the rich variety of English vowel sounds, to which we pay too little attention. Take, for instance, the subtle variations of the *o* sound in this passage: "Thou understandest my thought afar off. . . . There is not a word on my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether." There are perhaps too many "o" sounds here to make the passage quite satisfactory; but I give it only as one example of the resources of musical utterance that are present in English speech. The one grave disadvantage of the English language in the manner of euphony is its excess of sibilants; but that may be no more than a Welshman's prejudice. The Welsh version of the twenty-third psalm has only

seven s's; the *s* sound (either as s, ss, or c) occurs in the Authorised Version twenty-four times, and *sh* three times (not to speak of four terminal *th*'s which in modern English would be *s*'s).

2

As I have said, there is more in prose than meets the casual eye. As one star differeth from another in glory, so does one prose differ from another; and therein is the mystery of *style*. On this vexed question there has been much argument in which I am not qualified to join. I look up Sir Walter Raleigh's long essay on "Style," and I find that the problem of style involves such matters as Picture, Melody, Meaning, Slang, Archaism, Distinction, Assimilation, Synonyms, the doctrine of the *mot propre*, Sincerity, Decoration, and much besides; and it is plain that unusual literary erudition is required for the sufficient handling of the subject. For that I refer you to the masters. Yet in spite of all this apparent complexity of the subject, the matter is not so recondite where a little intelligence and

alertness may be counted upon. Let me set down two passages together:

For as in a body when the blood is fresh, the spirits pure and vigorous, not only to vital but to rational faculties, and those in the acutest and pertest operations of wit and subtlety, it argues in what good plight and constitution the body is—so when the cheerfulness of the people is so sprightly up, as that it has not only wherewith to guard well its own freedom and safety, but to spare, and to bestow upon the solidest and sublimest parts of controversy and new invention, it betokens us not degenerated, nor drooping to a fatal decay, but casting off the old and wrinkled skin of corruption to outlive these pangs and wax young again, entering the glorious ways of Truth and prosperous virtue, destined to become great and honorable in these latter ages. Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep and shaking her invincible locks. Methinks I see her as an eagle mewing her mighty youth and kindling her undazzled eyes at the full midday beam, purging and unsealing her long abused sight at the fountain itself of heavenly radiance, while the whole noise of timorous and flocking birds, with those also that love the twilight, flutter about, amazed at what she means, and in their envious gabble would prognosticate a year of sects and schisms.

And perfect the day shall be, when it is of all men understood that the beauty of Holiness must be in

labor as well as in rest. Nay! more, if it may be, in labor; in our strength, rather than in our weakness: and in the choice of what we shall work for through the six days and may know to be good at their evening time, than in the choice of what we pray for on the seventh, of reward or repose. With the multitude that keep holiday, we may perhaps vainly have gone up to the house of God and vainly there asked for what we fancied would be mercy; but for the few who labor as their Lord would have them, the mercy needs no seeking, and their wide home no hallowing.[4]

I take it that you need not to be told where these passages have been taken from. Both passages are eloquent and rhetorical, yet there is a great difference of flavor; and in that lies the problem of style. How does this difference of flavor arise? The only possible answer is that it arises from the difference between the writers themselves. Milton pleading for the freedom of the press, Ruskin pleading for honorable work, both pleading with equal passion, yet write differently, because Milton is Milton and Ruskin is Ruskin.

It is quite possible to write impeccable English merely by keeping the rules of the game; and what those rules are we learned

from our teachers of English composition at school. But the player who merely keeps the rules of the game is a tedious person to watch. The player whom your eye follows is he who keeps the rules in his own way, who to the rules adds his intelligence, his insight, his versatility, his courage. It is the same with the great writer. He keeps the rules, except when now and again they get into his way; but his style—the rhythm, the choice and ordering of words, the tone—all the elements that go to make up the elusive thing, *style*—is what he himself adds, and by adding he transforms what otherwise would have been a dead collocation of words into a living and moving thing. The style is the man, and is just as complex as the man himself. If we were at once learned and subtle enough in psychological analysis, we might even infer the heart and mind of the writer from his style alone, just as some profess to read his character in his calligraphy. "All style," says Sir Walter Raleigh, "is gesture, the gesture of the mind and heart. . . . While persons count, style, the index to persons,

can never count for little. 'Speak,' it has been said, 'that I may know you'—voice gesture is more than feature. Write, and after you have attained control over the instrument, you write yourself down, whether you will or no. There is no vice, however unconscious, no virtue, however shy, no touch of meanness or of generosity in your character, that will not pass on to the paper. You anticipate the Day of Judgment and furnish the recording angel with material."

However, it is well to remind ourselves that though style is the man, it is the death of good style to obtrude the man. It is this that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has in mind when he says that style in literature corresponds to good manners in behavior. "Though personality pervade style and cannot be escaped, the first sin against style as against good manners is to obtrude or to exploit personality." In the same sense, Clutton Brock tells us that "the master of prose is trusted and convinces, as those who are at the mercy of their own eloquence do not; and he gives a pleasure all the greater for being hardly noticed. In the best prose,

whether narrative or argument, we are so led on as we read that we do not stop to applaud the writer nor do we stop to question him." All of which is good sense for preachers not less than for writers.

Well, you may ask me, after all this, will you not tell us where good style may be found? Who are the great exemplars of style? Style being what it is, the reflection of personality, the answer to this question must be largely a matter of taste. But as I have no confidence in the inerrancy of my own taste, I shall not offer you any direction in this matter. I know those whose style falls happily and gratefully upon my own mind; and I am not afraid to own them. But it will serve you better if I give you the judgment of those whose continual preoccupation with literature gives them more weight than I could possibly have.

"The prose style of Swift," says Mr. Herbert Read, "is unique, an irrefrangible instrument of clear, animated, animating and effective thought. English prose has perhaps attained here and there a nobler

profundity, and here and there a subtler complexity; but never has it maintained such a constant level of inspired expression." But Mr. Read has also a good word to say of Bunyan and Defoe. Mr. Hilaire Belloc also votes for Swift: "Since prose style is excellent in proportion as it is lucid, Swift is first. There never was a man who could say what he had to say more clearly nor with a better certitude that every reader of every class would immediately understand him." I believe that most of the authorities would consent to this view, even though they might want to reserve a suffrage for certain other writers. And now, you will make haste, I have no doubt, to read over again *The Tale of a Tub,* and *Gulliver's Travels,* unless you, indeed, have so outgrown your childhood as to be unable to find yourself at home in the latter, though it was no book for children that Swift wrote. There is more of Swift than these—the *Journal to Stella,* in particular, and his political writings. You will not read him to imitate him, God forbid! but to understand what an instrument English

prose may be to declare those things which are committed to your charge.

3

As we pass on to the *matter* of prose the best I can do is to suggest to you a principle upon which to govern your own choice of reading. It may be that just here I am biased by that professional interest against which I have already warned you. For the principle which I am about to propose to you does order the modes of literature according to the measure of their importance to the preacher.

Literature, let me remind you, is a transcript of life; but in order to be great literature it must needs be a memorable transcript. If for the moment we might assume that all great literature is equally great, then the obvious procedure is to range it in the order of its *nearness to life*. You will, of course, remember that I am now thinking of prose only.

First, then, will come the literature created by the man who writes of himself, of his own life and its circumstances. He

may do this in a spontaneous and intimate way in *letters* to his friends; or he may be doing it of set purpose and with an eye on the public in an *autobiography;* or he may be doing it for his own private ends in a *diary* or book of *confessions.* Here you have life reported at first hand. I am not sure that we should not include in this company the intimate *essay,* which Montaigne begat and Charles Lamb superbly practiced, and which has made itself very much at home in an English habit.

Next to these comes *biography,* the tale of one man told by another, and as often as not, as much a disclosure of the writer as of his subject. With biography should go history, which is ideally the biography of men *en masse.*

Then, I think, comes *the literature that deals with the world in which men live,* the rich literature of adventure, of travel by land and sea, the literature of nature (such as W. H. Hudson and John Burroughs have given us), the records of exploration, mountain climbing, colonization, ships, piracy, whaling and other fishing,

these generally being not only descriptive records but human documents of profound interest. With these would go the records of missions, such as the *Jesuit Relations* and the *Life of David Livingstone.*

My next choice is the literature of *reflection upon life*—books like Santayana's *Soliloquies in England* and Havelock Ellis's *The Dance of Life.*

And finally, there is the imaginative reconstruction of life that we call *fiction.*

Plainly, there can be no hard-and-fast distinctions in a classification of this kind. One mode will inevitably and rightly invade the province of another. Besides, there are distinctions to be made, as, for instance, between letters and letters, for there are letters which are not letters. Then there are autobiographies which are written to prove a case; and there is fiction which is only thinly-veiled preaching. I am not questioning the legitimacy of these hybrid forms; but, plainly, there is a question of their value as transcripts of life. Besides, my list is clearly incomplete. I leave it as it is, partly because it is more

than enough to go on with, and partly because I am thinking of literature as primarily a means of communion rather than as a means of information or instruction, or, to use de Quincey's distinction, of the literature that *moves* rather than of the literature that instructs. I have, therefore, nothing to do at present with works of science or philosophy, though one cannot deny their title to be regarded as literature. I shall, however, have a word to say of a class of literature of much importance and interest, which is strictly relevant to these lectures, namely, the literature of literary criticism.

I confess to a strong partiality for *personal letters*. It is not commonly recognized how rich an inheritance we have of this kind of literature in England. Letter-writing is of great antiquity, though the body of letters which has come down to us from ancient times is surprisingly small, in view of our knowledge of the extent to which letter-writing was practiced. I have read that a papyrus sheet has been discovered which records the time of the delivery

of "registered letters"—and that it belongs to the Roman occupation of Egypt. The most important of the letters of antiquity preserved to us are already familiar to this company; and we owe it to modern biblical scholarship, chiefly at the hands of Adolf Deissmann, that we are able to read the Pauline Epistles as real letters and not as theological treatises disguised as letters. But from the Paston letters of the fifteenth century (a remarkable family record) we have in the English language such a number and variety of collections of letters as should suit the most catholic appetite. There are, as I have said, letters which are not letters. The *Letters of Junius,* Sydney Smith's *Letters on the Subject of Catholics* are not letters but pamphlets on political affairs; and there are others which have the flavor of intimate conversation, but which, nevertheless, betray a writer with an eye on the public or on posterity. But there is no dearth of the genuine article; and the reading of it is a delightful and rewarding employment. Take Cowper's *Letters,* for instance, which are among the

best in England. A very large number of them are available and accessible. You will learn at once as you read them that there is no such thing as an art of letter-writing. That is not to say that a letter may not be a work of art. Many letters are. It only means that there is no recognizable technique of letter-writing. A man sits down with pen in hand and paper in front of him and lets himself go—but all the time to one person with whom there is no need to strike an attitude or to be on guard. With Cowper everything was grist that came to his mill. "The price, conveyance, and condition of the fish his correspondents buy him or give him (Cowper was fond of fish and lived, before railways, in the heart of the Midlands); one of the most uneventful of picnics; hairs and hair (one of his most characteristic pieces of quietly ironic humor is a brief descant on wigs with a suggestion that fashion should decree the cutting off of people's own legs and the substitution of artificial ones); the height of chairs and candlesticks—anything will do." Thus Professor Saintsbury. And

Sir Walter Raleigh goes so far as to say that "if Cowper writes well on anything that happens, he writes best when nothing, absolutely nothing has happened." Coleridge called it his "divine chit-chat." Let me quote you a characteristic passage of Cowper. He writes to John Newton:

I sit with all the windows and the door wide open, and am regaled with the scent of every flower in a garden as full of flowers as I have known how to make it. We keep no bees, but if I lived in a hive, I should hardly hear more of their music. All the bees in the neighborhood resort to a bed of mignonette opposite to the window, and pay me for the honey they get out of it by a hum, which though rather monotonous, is as agreeable to my ear as the whistling of my linnets. All the sounds that nature utters are delightful—at least in this country. I should not perhaps find the roaring of lions in Africa or of bears in Russia very pleasing; but I know no beast in England whose voice I do not account musical, save and except only the braying of an ass. The notes of all our birds and fowls please me, without one exception: I should not indeed think of keeping a goose in a cage that I might hang him up in a parlor for the sake of his melody, but a goose on a common or in a farmyard is no bad performer; and as to insects, if the black beetle, and beetles, indeed, of all hues, will keep out of my way, I

have no objection to any of the rest; on the contrary, in whatever key they sing, from the gnat's fine treble to the bass of a bumblebee, I admire them all.

And so on, until for a moment at the end of the letter he lifts the curtain on the dark tragedy of his own life:

There is somewhere in infinite space a world that does not roll within the precincts of mercy, and as it is reasonable, and even scriptural, to suppose that there is music in heaven, in those dismal regions the reverse of it is found; tones so dismal, as to make woe itself more insupportable and to acuminate even despair. But my paper admonishes me to draw the reins and check the descent of my fancy into deeps with which she is but too familiar.

My own edition of the *Letters* is Dr. J. G. Frazer's, in two volumes, and it contains three hundred and forty-eight letters. It was a kindly Providence that dictated their preservation in the face of their writer's occasional injunctions to his friends to burn them. So little did he account them. Yet what riches they are to us!

Then there are Charles Lamb's letters. It is difficult to speak of Charles Lamb without emotion. "His adult life," says

J. B. Priestley, "begins in tragedy. He comes swaying, a grave and sensitive youth, out of a great darkness. Henceforward his whole life must be deliberately controlled, dedicated to certain ends. He must walk down a narrow channel, where there is for him neither marriage nor children, neither personal freedom nor the promise of gratified ambition, a long, straight way with a grave at the end of it. His days must be spent at the office desk, and his nights with that sister to whom his life was dedicated, that sister who was forever wandering back again into the dark of madness. When the two knew the shadows were closing round her again, he would take her to the asylum, they would be seen going there together arm in arm, weeping."[5] But how gayly, how gallantly he carried it off in the face of the world! In a recent book (from which the above passage is taken) on *English Humor,* Lamb has a chapter all to himself. But that humor was the overflow of a rich humanity, and as it were, the make-weight on the one side to balance the tragedy on the other side of his life. Lamb

is best known to the world through his essays, but the essays are one remove farther away from the man than the letters, though no essays are nearer their man than his. This will give you a taste of the quality of his letters: Wordsworth has invited him up to the Lake Country and he replies:

Separate from the pleasure of your company, I don't much care if I never see a mountain in my life. I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many attachments, as any of you mountaineers can have done with dead nature. The lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street, the innumerable trades, tradesmen and customers, coaches, wagons, playhouses, all the bustle and wickedness about Covent Garden, the very women of the town, the watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles, life awake, if you awake at all hours of the night, the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street, the crowds, the very dirt and mud, the sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print shops, the old bookstalls, parsons' cheapening books, coffee houses, steams of soups from kitchens, the pantomimes, London itself, a pantomime and masquerade —all these things work into my mind and feed me, without the power of satiating me.

His love was for the haunts of men; and yet he cried aloud for solitude. "Plato's

double animal, parted," he writes to Mrs. Wordsworth, meaning the poet to overhear, "never longed to be more reciprocally reunited in the system of its first creation than I sometimes do to be but for a moment single and separate. Except my morning's walk to the office, which is like treading on lands of gold for that reason, I am never so. I cannot walk home from the office but some officious friend offers his unwelcome courtesies to accompany me. . . . I am never C. L. but always C. L. and Co. He who thought it not good for man to be alone, preserve me from the more prodigious monstrosity of being never by myself." And yet none lived so deeply in the sympathy of his friends than did Lamb. "Two or three have died," he writes, "within these last two twelve-months, and so many parts of me have been numbed. One sees a picture and reads an anecdote, starts a casual fancy, and thinks to tell of it to this person in preference to every other: the person is gone whom it would have peculiarly suited. It won't do for another. Every departure destroys a class of sym-

pathies. There's Captain Barney gone! What fun has whist now? What matters it what you lead, if you can no longer fancy him looking over you? . . . Thus one distributes oneself about; and now for so many parts of me I have lost the market. Common natures do not suffice me. Good people, as they are called, won't serve. I want individuals. I am made up of queer points, and I want so many answering needles." It was Lamb, you remember, who wrote the poem on "the old familiar faces." And so Lamb unawares draws line upon line his own portrait, and lives on, the best beloved of English men of letters.

We might spend many hours in this delectable region; but we had better move on. There are those who hold that women write better letters than men; and, having read Mrs. Carlyle's letters, you might be persuaded to the same opinion. For myself, I have much delight in the letters of Emily Dickinson included in her *Life*. That reminds me that some of the most important letters are incorporated in biographies—

Newman's, for instance; but there the letter is apt to lose some of its quality as a letter by reason of the biographical purpose which it is made to serve. Time fails me to speak of others whose letters are much worth reading—Horace Walpole, Keats, Thomas Gray, and many another of the old guard. Nor has the gift of writing a good letter died from among us; and we have Walter Hines Page's letters and those of the brothers William and Henry James to prove it. I have some fear, however, that the written letter may pass away, and the dictated typewritten letter take its place—which would be a great calamity. It fell to me some little time ago to write a short biography; and I discovered that the typewritten letter was as a rule useless for the purpose. Sometimes a line or two of postscript in handwriting would prove more revealing than several typewritten pages. The presence of a third party between the writer and the receiver of a letter tends to muffle the personal accent, and something is lost in warmth and spontaneity. A friend of mine engaged about the same time

on a biography of great importance told me, as we were comparing notes, that his experience had been the same as mine.

4

Autobiography is a different matter from letters. Here you have to go much more warily. For there are in the human heart two mortal enemies to autobiography, namely, self-esteem and shame. A man often writes his own life-story in order that the world may take him at his own assessment of himself. It is, of course, true that no man can ever be so ceaselessly vigilant in writing his autobiography as not to expose his actual self now and again, without knowing that he is doing so. I confess that having recently read some volumes of political autobiography, a certain cynicism has invaded my mind in respect of this kind of literature. In three of these volumes there was no single indication that the writer had ever made a mistake or committed a sin; and I do not believe that such perfection exists, even among statesmen. Evidently, the writer was in each case writ-

ing an *apologia pro vita sua,* which is a different thing from autobiography; and its actual effect is to start in the mind of the reader a speculation upon the psychological and ethical effects of political life. Newman once wrote a sort of autobiography, but, like a man, he called it *Apologia pro Vita Sua;* so we know at once where we are. Few men would, I imagine, care to say the whole truth about themselves; and perhaps on that account autobiography should be discouraged. That, however, would cause us loss of an occasional autobiography which we could ill afford to do without. *The Autobiography of Benvenuto Cellini* was not written for edification: but there at least you have the story of a man who did not care what the world thought of him. Perhaps he would have been a better man if his sense of shame had been more developed; but he could not even then have written a truer book. In the event he wrote a book that no student of human nature can ignore.

For my part, I do not highly regard *confessions.* They are, on the whole, less lit-

erature than materials for the study of morbid psychology. Often they wear too consciously the white sheet of penitence or the white flower of a blameless life. Now and again we encounter a kind of inverted Pharisaism which leads a man to make himself out to have been a gayer dog than he was: you almost hear him, like the other Pharisee, praying "with himself," "I thank thee I am not as these puritans." At other times there is an "inferiority complex" or an *idée fixe* which distorts the picture. Confessions are not, however, to be shunned. I am insisting only that the unconscious revelation is of more consequence than the portrait which the writer desires you to see; and for the careful student there is much to be learned in this region concerning the pathology of the human mind. There are, to be sure, many frank and courageous confessions—Saint Augustine's for instance. But it is a mode of literature which has not been abundant in English. Perhaps the English mind does not take kindly to the sort of introspection that confession requires. Let me, however,

warn you against accepting my judgments in this region without due inquiry of your own. Charles Lamb writes to Coleridge about his poems: "I love them as I love the *Confessions* of Rousseau, and for the same reason: the same frankness, the same openness of heart, the same disclosure of all the most hidden and delicate affections of the mind." Charles Lamb must be right; but one must speak as he finds, and I do not find these grounds of admiration in Rousseau's *Confessions*.*

If English is not rich in Confessions, the *diary* is quite another story. Here there is great wealth of living and revealing literature. You have, for instance, the diaries of John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys, of Thomas Moore and Crabbe Robinson, mines of contemporary information and pieces of vivid portraiture. Perhaps there is nowhere in literature a better example of the saying that "the style is the man" than Pepys' *Diary*. Of the same kind are *Jour-*

*M. Jean Prevost says that the *Confessions* of Rousseau are "less a disinterested biography than a justificatory memoir." Maurois, *Aspects of Biography*, p. 105.

nals, as those of Sir Walter Scott, John Woolman, and John Wesley. Nor are the diary and the journal an obsolete mode; for we have had in recent times Barbellion's tragic *Diary of a Disappointed Man,* and Katherine Mansfield's candid *Journal.* In this field there is admirable guidance for the reader in Mr. Ponsonby's recent book, *Diaries and Their Writers.* The special value of the diary is that it is not addressed to the public. It is the private record which takes you behind the scences in the writer's life and often unveils circumstances at which the world would never otherwise have guessed. *The Diary of a Disappointed Man* reveals the tragedy of a frustrated career; and in general the diaries and the journals of the "mortally wounded" are an astonishing revelation of the strength and the infirmity of the human soul. The *Journal* of Amiel (in Mrs. Humphry Ward's translation) no preacher should leave unread and unpondered; and the pains and the trials of the artistic temperament have never been more poignantly told than in the *Diary* of Marie Bashkirtseff.

Concerning the "intimate essay" much might be said. You may have essays on many subjects—Macaulay's, for example, which are grave and learned discourses on literature, politics, and history. There was once a famous and disturbing volume entitled *Essays and Reviews,* which was a collection of theological discussions. Because all genuine writing is a revelation of the writer, you will find not only theology and history and criticism in such essays as these but the features of living men. You may, I say. For it is not always certain. There is many a thing labeled an essay which yields you little of man or of meaning; and its title to the name is only in the purely physical fact of its length. For that, according to Montaigne, the father of the essay, is the distinction of the essay. It is a form determined by the amount of reading that a man can take in at a sitting. Montaigne, says one competent critic, "had a sense of the natural man's need, who wishes to be entertained and not to be lectured, or overdosed in the moral zeal of the essayist." But Montaigne was not the

inventor of the essay; it was he, however, who gave it the characteristic form in which we know it. Hitherto it had tended to be a treatise, but in his hands it turned into a *causerie*. It ceased to be a solemn deliverance from a lecturer's desk; it became a man talking easily to you from his arm-chair. "Himself," says Mr. Ernest Rhys, "was the premise. 'I consider myself variously,' 'I present myself standing and lying,' 'Let death find me planting cabbages.' Life and death, how he lived, what he thought, or how other men like himself were affected. He wishes us to take him for a simple *causeur* and his essays for a conversation with his readers." It would be, of course, excessive to say that you can draw a sharp line between the *causerie* and the more formal essay. But there is a considerable gulf fixed between, say, Charles Lamb and Walter Bagehot, between John Morley and Christopher Morley. Yet they are all in the brotherhood; and the essay cannot be reduced to rule. The treatise and the *causerie* cannot be prevented from blending together. All the same you are

nearer your man in an essay of Elia than you are in a Macaulay, in an *"obiter dictum"* of Augustine Birrell than in an essay of Matthew Arnold. I confess my partiality for the first person singular in the essay. "Walking the other day in Cheapside," writes Samuel Butler, "I saw some turtles in Mr. Sweeting's window and was tempted to stay and to look at them." Naturally, you stay and look at them with him; and presently you find yourself, almost without knowing it, rambling along Cheapside with Butler, and seeing it as you never saw it before. By an easy transition, that reminds one of Robert Louis Stevenson's essay on "Walking Tours," in the course of which he tells us that a volume of Hazlitt's *Essays* is a capital pocketbook for such a journey. Speaking of walking tours, one recalls C. E. Montague's volume of essays on *The Right Place,* in which you may read of roads and maps and mountains until your very soles itch to take the road. The *causerie* has its very effective and modern practitioners—Robert Lynd, A. A. Milne, and others; and the study of the essay as

a branch of English literature from Bacon, through Addison and Steele down to our own contemporaries, is in itself a liberal education. A handsome introduction to the treasury of the English essay will be found in five cheap volumes edited by Mr. Ernest Rhys, entitled *Modern English Essays;* and even if you go no further afield than this collection, you would irrevocably fall under the spell of the essay. And it would not be possible for you to remain satisfied without exploring further into this rich treasure.

Biography should receive more attention than we can give to it within the limits imposed upon us. There is, as no doubt you have found out, more than one kind of biography. There is a biography which is no more than a bare chronicle of a man's life and doings; there is another which aims not so much at telling a story as painting a picture, to show you the man as he was in his habit in life. There is still another which is written to prove a case either concerning its subject or concerning some pet theory of the author. Sometimes a biogra-

phy is written with too little imagination, and sometimes with too much. It would be difficult to discover the ideal biography. In English one biography does indeed stand head and shoulders above all others: Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson.* "When I called upon Doctor Johnson next morning (there had been a dinner at the Crown and Anchor Tavern in the Strand the night before), I found him highly satisfied with his colloquial prowess the preceding evening. 'Well,' said he, 'we had a good talk.' *Boswell:* 'Yes, sir, you tossed and gored several persons.'

"The late Alexander, Earl of Eglintoune, who loved wit more than wine, and men of genius more than sycophants, had a great admiration of Johnson; but from the remarkable elegance of his own manners was, perhaps, too delicately sensible of the roughness which sometimes appeared in Johnson's behavior. One evening about this time . . . he regretted that Johnson had not been educated with more refinement and lived more in polished society. 'No, no, my Lord (said Signor Baretti), do

with him what you would, he would always have been a bear.' 'True,' answered the Earl with a smile, 'but he would have been a *dancing* bear.'

"To obviate all the reflections which have gone round the world to Johnson's prejudice, by applying to him the epithet of a *bear,* let me impress upon my readers a just and happy saying of my friend Goldsmith, who knew him well: 'Johnson, to be sure, has a roughness in his manner: but no man alive has a more tender heart. *He has nothing of the bear but his skin.*'"

That gives you at once a taste of Boswell and a glimpse of Johnson. Johnson, this great tender soul in a bearskin, brusque and generous, honest, enemy of cant and pretentiousness, uncompromising Tory, of a heart humble and devout, endowed with abilities and insight far beyond the mass of men—to him Providence provided at once a satellite and a foil, James Boswell. This James Boswell attached himself to Johnson by a deep and admiring devotion; and he was proud to be at once the butt of Johnson's jokes and the repository of his con-

versation. Boswell was not without parts; but apart from Johnson he would hardly have cut a figure of distinction in the world. He dedicated himself to the business of (as he said) "embalming" Johnson for posterity; and in so doing gained immortality for himself. The book he has written stands by itself, a joy forever. Few biographers have had such a subject; no subject has ever had so consummate a biographer. There are, to be sure, biographies technically more perfect, but none which body forth the living man—and what a man!—as does Boswell's.

At the moment there is something of a revolution in biographical method. In the traditional biography we have the steady march from the first chapter, "Ancestry and Birth," to the last chapter, "Last Days and Death." Incident and event are duly chronicled against a historical and cultural background carefully and minutely painted; there is a discreet interpolation of letters to and from the subject of the volume and a few pertinent illustrations. Throughout, there is an evident aim to glorify the sub-

ject; his faults are discreetly slurred over and his mistakes explained away, while his triumphs are bodied forth with zealous eloquence. It is really a process of "embalming"; and often the biography raises the question whether the man has ever been really alive. Not so very long ago appeared the life of an eminent physician, but we could not see the wood for the trees. A small selection of the written and spoken words of the same physician which appeared about the same time told us more of the man than the two laborious volumes of his Life. And it is the *man* we desire to become acquainted with. We go to biography for its human content; too often we find little more than a lay figure which serves as the excuse for a prolonged narrative. From this it was inevitable that a reaction should come. Few men are quite as great or as good as their biographers make them out to be.

And the reaction has come. Indeed, two reactions have come. The first we associate with the name of Lytton Strachey, the other with Emil Ludwig and André Mau-

rois. It has always seemed to me that Lytton Strachey has felt a vocation to strip certain accepted heroes and heroines of their popular haloes. It is a commonplace how quickly historical figures are apt to acquire a legendary character. They receive a popular canonization which entirely distorts the man of flesh and blood. He who enables us to rediscover the common humanity of our heroes is our benefactor. But his is a thankless task. For he seems to be belittling and even libeling our heroes. In his task he has indeed had to use acid, in order to dissolve away the mythical accretions to the character; and then he is loftily reproved by the pundits for despoiling the great and the good of their due glory. We owe to Lytton Strachey the restoration of the humanity of several conspicuous figures in English life. In particular he brought Queen Victoria down from the clouds of sentimental adoration and presented a living woman for whom it is possible to feel a natural human affection.

The other reaction is to what I would

venture to describe as romantic biography. M. Maurois tells us that it is the application of the method of the novel to biography. I have no doubt that there is something to be said for this. But even more than in ordinary biography do we get a picture of the man as the writer sees him. Herr Ludwig studies Napoleon, makes up his mind what manner of man he was, and then tells the story to suit his picture of the man. In the end he presents us not with Napoleon Bonaparte but with Napoleon-Ludwig, for the book is as much a revelation of Ludwig as it is of Napoleon. Plainly, on this showing, the name of Napoleon is legion, for there are as many of him as there are those who may attempt and are able to write his life in this manner.

I am left with the sense that the new biography has not yet arrived, though I believe it will. It will steer clear of the somewhat acid candor of Lytton Strachey and of the rather full-bodied dramatizations of Ludwig, and discover a medium and a technique which will be as suited to its art as the medium and the technique

of a great portrait painter are to his. In the meantime, while we shall not pass by Lytton Strachey and Ludwig, we shall do well to read the older biographies too, supplying our own correctives and making our own pictures of their subjects.

I reluctantly pass over the rest of our analysis, taking time only for a few words upon the literature of literary criticism. By criticism here I do not mean book reviews, for those are largely hackwork and do little more than call attention to newly published books. So far they are useful. As judgments on books, they are, for the most part, unreliable and useless. The kind of criticism I am thinking of is that which begins with a sustained effort to discover the author's intention, and consists in an appraisal of the means by which he carries out his intention, and of how far he has succeeded in what he set out to do. It is a task profounder and more difficult than merely saying in general terms what is in a book and then pronouncing it to be good or bad or indifferent. It rises above all mere praise or blame; it is the just and fine

appraisal of a work in the light of other works that are comparable to it, and which have established themselves as standards of excellence; it is the discriminating full-dress judgment upon an author in the light of the established reputations of his own class. It goes down to first principles; it examines matter and manner; it compares and it contrasts; and over against previous achievements in that particular field, it passes a calm and equitable judgment. Now, of this kind of criticism there is an abundance in English. The modern tradition begins with Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria,* and it still flourishes. I need not mention names; but you will find the kind of thing I mean in such books as Macaulay's and Walter Bagehot's *Essays,* Sir Walter Raleigh's *Some Authors,* Ker's *Art of Poetry,* the works of Paul Elmer Moore and T. S. Eliot, and the like. The great value of such criticism is that it helps in the cultivation of taste. It enables you to understand what literary excellence consists in and to discover it for yourself. It teaches you to formulate for yourself stand-

ards of good judgment upon all the elements that constitute literature. It saves you from being hoodwinked by blurbs on the covers of books and from being seduced into the purchase of "best sellers" or any other flash in the pan.

CHAPTER III

THE NEST OF SINGING BIRDS

I

"THEN, sir," said Boswell one day to Doctor Johnson, "what is poetry?"

"Why, sir," answered the great man, "it is much easier to say what it is not. We all *know* what light is, but it is not easy to tell what it is."

Where Doctor Johnson was loth to tread, it is not for me to rush in. Concerning the nature of poetry, there has been much argument: and the more poetry I read the less encouraged am I to join in the argument. There is an old warning against looking a gift horse in the mouth; and I am disposed to think that the more we discuss the nature of poetry in the abstract, the more we endanger our capacity of receiving from poetry the impression that it is meant to convey to us. Consider, for example, this: When Keats sat down to

write *Endymion,* he first wrote his opening line, "A thing of beauty is a constant joy," but later he amended it and wrote the line we know—"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever." It does not take much poetic intuition to recognize that the revised line is poetry, while the original line is hardly more than matter-of-fact statement. What is it that makes the line we are familiar with itself a thing of beauty and a joy forever? There are two lines of Coventry Patmore's which have for years comforted me:

> "In divinity and love
> What's best worth saying can't be said;"

and I suspect that poetry keeps company with divinity and love in having a secret which cannot be told. There is here a residuum of mystery which so far eludes our analysis. Whether or not it will always do so no one can tell. But if some day this inmost secret is tracked out, I shall fear for the dominion of poetry.

There is no doubt that poetry does something with words which makes them carry

a good deal more than their dictionary load. It touches them with a magic that gives them a nimbus of significance that their prose "face value" does not at all suggest. You no doubt remember Browning's poem, *Abt Vogler,* and that, speaking of music, he says,

"But here is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them, and, lo, they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star;"

Mr. G. F. Bradby, in an admirable little book called *About English Poetry* (which I should warmly counsel any man to get who desires "first aid" in the study of poetry), commenting on this subject, goes on after quoting these lines to say: "Something of the same nature seems to happen in poetry. Words, when the poet is inspired, are used in a way that produces not a sentence, 'but a star.' Alter a word, change its place—and the star goes out. It is neither

in the thought alone, nor in the words used to express it, nor in the rhythm, nor the melody, that the magic lies, but in some subtle harmony of all four. It is easier to feel the truth of all this than to explain it; and we experience it most often, I think, in Shakespeare, who more than any other poet possessed the power of weaving a spell with words."[6] Mr. Bradby says, and he is no doubt right, that thought, word, rhythm, and melody are involved in this creative moment; for creative the moment is, since it brings forth a new thing. But you will have noticed that all this happens only "when the poet is inspired." Some inspiration or excitement of the poet takes upon itself a fitting body of words, so that it transmits the experience to the reader. That, indeed, is the poet's own account of the matter. Mr. A. E. Housman, in the preface to his *Last Poems,* speaks of the "continuous excitement" under which he wrote *The Shropshire Lad* in 1895. It is not only an affair of competent craftsmanship. You may have word, rhythm, thought, melody, all impeccable; but the result is not nec-

essarily poetry though it may be excellent verse. Poetry cannot be "made to measure." The poet does not say, "Go to, I will write a poem." He has to wait for a prompting which cannot be summoned at will—though he can, indeed, put himself in the way of such a prompting by meditation, by submitting himself to the emotional effects of a scene or a thing of beauty, just as a preacher may lie in wait for a revelation by giving himself to prayer. It is true that the critical study of poetry involves one in much ado about the structure of the poem; but the poem with the most perfect structure is not necessarily the best poem: it may not be strictly a poem at all. There is a story (I forget how I came by it, and I can vouch only for its general sense and not at all for its details) of Sir Joshua Reynolds being asked for an opinion upon a picture, which a friend, hoping for a favorable judgment, showed him. Sir Joshua did his best. "The composition is good," he said, "the *chiaroscura* is excellent; the coloring is admirable; but—" He hesitated and then with a flip of his fingers, snapped

out, "It wants *that!*" It is just *that* that makes poetry poetry, and then eludes our definition.

I have already drawn a distinction between poetry and prose in the previous lecture, but it is necessary to attend to that other important distinction—between verse and poetry. Lord Acton somewhere speaks of "that undiscovered country where church and state are parted"; there is also an undiscovered country where prose and poetry are parted. It is impossible to draw the line where the domain of prose ends and the domain of poetry begins. There is certainly a no man's land between them, in which we find rhetoric and poetic prose. Perhaps we may say that we have left the domain of pure prose when emotion begins to insinuate itself into our prose. Prose written under any intensity of emotion begins to fall into marked rhythm and measure. In rhetorical prose you will often come upon lines of blank verse; and the quality of poetic prose is unmistakable:

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any

heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

This is undoubtedly more poetical than Dr. Watt's metrical paraphrase, which is indeed hardly good verse:

"The Lamb which dwells amidst the throne
Shall o'er them still preside;
Feed them with nourishment divine
And all their footsteps guide.

"In pastures green, he'll lead his flock
Where living streams appear;
And God the Lord from every eye
Shall wipe off every tear."

This evidently was written on one of Dr. Watt's "off-days." Yet it remains true that the genealogy of poetry must accord a place to verse. Historically, verse appears to have come before prose. Its beginnings are in the days when there was no written literature, and (in this, I follow Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch) the forerunners of the man of letters were the minstrel and the bard, who carried their wares about the country,

for the entertainment of those who were able to pay the price of board and lodging and a supply of provender for the morrow's journey. These aboriginal men of letters seem to have had a repertory of emotional chronicles which would naturally fall into rhythm; but as they had to carry their repertory in their memories, they also carried for the assistance of memory a harp. They recited or chanted their pieces to elementary music; and naturally the music added its own quantum of emotion to the recital and in time imposed on the chronicle a structure of meter. Prose began probably as sustained narration with a minimum of emotion; but that only became possible with the birth of an art of writing. The original literary form was spoken or chanted verse, paradoxical as that may seem. You may, if you choose, say that prose is verse which has lost its metrical structure, though not its rhythm, in the measure that emotion has been withdrawn from it; and poetry is verse in which the emotional content has reached such a height as to make it a new *genus*. We may

perhaps speak of it as an emergent, in the sense in which that word has been made familiar by Professor Lloyd Morgan in biology. For though there may be in a poem no ingredient that is not present in good verse, yet there is in a poem that which is able to move you as verse cannot. Emily Dickinson, in one of her letters, writes: "If I read a book and it makes my whole body so cold no fire can ever warm me, I know that is poetry. If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know that it is poetry. These are the only ways I know it. Is there any other way?"[7] I don't know that there is. It is the property of living poetry that it throws the reader into an ecstasy, sets him beside himself. The ecstasy will vary in intensity, according to the quality of the poetry and the reader's sensibility. It is clear that some poetry took Emily Dickinson by storm; in such cases, the poetry itself must be great and the reader of acute sensibility. But it must not be supposed that milder and less seismic effects are not genuine ecstasy. You have no doubt watched an aero-

plane starting out on a flight. First it runs along the ground with increasing velocity, until a moment comes when almost imperceptibly it leaves the ground and takes the air. It seems to me that in verse the poetic impulse is moving along the ground; but whensoever it leaves the ground, it begins to achieve poetry.

While I am on this point, perhaps I should speak of the modern movement in poetry, which we are in the habit of describing as "free verse." It is one of those recurrent revolts which happen in every part of life, when life ceases to be satisfied with the prevailing conventions and seeks to establish new modes. It is a new version of the romantic revolt from the classical tradition in poetry. Of the importance of this movement, it is still too early to judge. And if you are interested enough to inquire what issues are involved in it, I commend to you two lectures—one by Mr. Edmund Blundell and the other by Miss Edith Sitwell, in a little book recently published under the title of *Tradition and Experiment in Literature.* In the last century

there was in Welsh poetry a revolt against the traditional "strict meters" in favor of the "free meters" on the ground that the traditional forms imposed undue restrictions upon the muse. The forms were made for the muse, and not the muse for the forms; and I imagine that it is precisely this claim for an emancipated muse that underlies the modern movement. It is not hard to emancipate the muse from the bondage of rime, for blank verse has long been an established convention. But "free verse" strives to deliver it from the bondage of metrical structure, and to leave it free to express itself mainly by rhythm and the music of words. At present this new impulse is being somewhat discredited by inferior practitioners who have taken the bit between the teeth and are perpetrating extravagances which in their sublime self-confidence they present to us presumably as authentic inspirations; for instance, this is an alleged poem, entitled "In a Restaurant":

"You are a sweet girl; and I must leave you to pay the waiter.

You are a sweet girl; and I will give you a bunch of
narcissus.
You are a sweet girl; and I will chew your ear."

And we have Miss Sitwell's word for it that this appeared in print. Here is another called "Sunset":

"stinging
gold swarms
upon the spires
silver

chants the litanies the
great bells are ringing with rose,
the lewd fat bells
and a still
wind
is dragging
the
sea

with
dream-
s."

A great gulf is fixed between this drivel and the work, say, of Amy Lowell, T. S. Eliot, Miss Sitwell, and other serious exponents of the new movement. It would be unwise to allow the follies of the second-

rate to discredit a point of view which can make a good case for itself and which is likely to make a definite contribution to the development of poetry, even though at this moment we cannot tell the weight or the precise nature of the contribution.

2

There has, of course, been much debate about the psychological factors which conspire to bring about the miracle of poetry. Into this obscure region we shall not venture. There is, however, a theory of poetry which has its special interest for preachers, partly because its exponent is a minister of religion, and partly because it links religion and poetry together in a fresh and illuminating fashion. You may find the whole discussion in a little volume called *Prayer and Poetry,* by the Abbé Henri Brémond. After arguing that the poetic faculty is to be clearly distinguished from the reasoning faculty, he goes on to inquire into the affinities of the former; and he finds the closest affinity to it in mysticism. He does not assign a specific meaning at

this point to the term "mysticism"; for his purpose it signifies the intuition of the Divine Presence at any point and under any form; and he quotes with approval an English fellow priest who speaks of the "resemblances between the flashes of inspiration which reveal and define genius, and the mysterious intuition of the Divine Presence, granted to the mystics." There have been writers before Brémond who have used poetic inspiration to interpret the experience of the mystic; but Brémond is the first, so far as I know, to reverse the process. As he says, he uses the experience of John of the Cross to interpret the experience of Shelley; and the upshot of his argument is that "poetic activity is a profane, natural sort of preliminary sketch of mystical activity," and that "the poet in the last resort is but an evanescent mystic whose mysticism breaks down." The poet aims at the unattainable, but the mystic finds it. The reason for the poet's failure is that he is tormented by the need of communicating his experience, and that in order to do so he has to use words. No

doubt, he uses words magically so that he does communicate his experience to the reader in the measure that the reader is capable of appropriating it. But words are of the earth, earthy, and consequently his experience is communicated in a fashion "confused, clumsy, full of blanks." I confess that just here I find it difficult to follow M. Brémond. No doubt the experience of the mystic is in the last resort incommunicable. Saint Paul tells us of one such experience of his own. Yet you remember how Saint Paul rather frowned upon the incommunicable ecstasies of his converts. "Now," he says, "I would have you all speak with tongues [that is glossolilia, coherent but unintelligible utterance, having the form but not the sense of speech], but rather that ye should prophesy: and greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues. Unless ye utter by the tongue speech easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken? For ye will be speaking into the air." For my own part I am, with Saint Paul, all for intelligibility, so far as the subject mat-

ter allows of it. And would M. Brémond rank the prophet as a mystic whose mysticism has broken down, because he endeavors to make himself articulate to the man in the street, and is he therefore inferior to the inarticulate mystic? I confess I cannot see it. It may be that the mystic has the higher privilege in his ultimate vision of God, and no doubt he is the mightier man for that. But I confess that the poet or the prophet who may offer me only a crust is a more *Christian* figure than the mystic who offers me a rarefied bread that I cannot see, much less eat.

And, let me add, I decline any longer to accept any hard-and-fast distinction in this region between a "profane" poetic activity and a "sacred" mystical activity. You cannot so partition life. I agree that poetry—the real thing—at its highest is akin to prayer. Both are of the nature of aspiration. But prayer aspires immediately to God; poetry aspires mediately, that is, by way of beauty; and so close are the two roads that sometimes they merge into one another. Take for instance Shel-

ley's *Ode to the West Wind,* which begins with an apostrophe to the West Wind and presently grows into what is plainly a prayer to the Holy Spirit:

"O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing . . . ,

"Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere:
Destroyer and preserver, hear, oh hear!"

That is the note of the invocation; but listen to him now and to what his heart is saying:

"If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear,
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

"The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Than thou, O uncontrollable! . . .
. . . . . .
Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is,
What if my leaves are falling like its own?
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

"Will take from both a deep autumnal tone
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

"Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth
And, by the incantation of this verse,

"Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind;
Be through my lips to unawakened earth

"The trumpet of a prophecy! . . ."

I ask you whether that be not just such a prayer as you and I might offer to "the wind that bloweth where it listeth." Whatever the poet may have been consciously doing, there can be no doubt as to what his soul was crying.

Upon this question, I shall detain you no longer, save only to say that I have elsewhere endeavored to broaden out the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to cover poetic and other artistic inspiration.* I believe that all inspiration, whether of the poet or the musician or the painter or the prophet is of the one Spirit; and that the kinship of poetry and prayer has its origin in that circumstance. It is precisely the

*In a little book entitled, *The Spirit of God and the Faith of To-day.*

poetry and the music which, to use Emily Dickinson's forcible figure, lifts the top off our heads, that is most fully inspired by the same Divine Spirit. A friend of mine, himself a minister and an accomplished "enjoyer" of music, J. D. M. Rorke, in a little book, *A Musical Pilgrim's Progress,* speaks of certain passages of Beethoven: "This is a music which is beyond the best, not because it is still more beautiful, but because, it seems, as it were, to be emancipated from the ordinary conditions of birth and constraints of embodiment. It is like the primal essential stuff of which music is made, the uncondensed raw material of music. If it is a quality of the highest music that it should sound as if it had always existed, that it should seem to have been not made but discovered, there is no music that satisfies the test so abundantly as this. It is music overheard; the composer himself is the listener." "The inner music to all appearance, floats out into utterance, unconstrained, free, formless, except in so far as it is a form to itself." It may be that the musician can

fly higher than the poet; possibly pure sound is a less hampering instrument than words. Upon this matter, I have no competence. But I have come upon moments in the reading of the poets, William Blake, Shelley, Francis Thompson, which I could only describe in some such terms as Mr. Rorke uses of the high moments of Beethoven—

> "Sun, moon, and stars forgot,
> Upward I fly,"

as it were to the gates of heaven. And I would bring all such achievements under the heading familiar to our theological grandfathers as "the Work of the Holy Ghost."[8]

3

Perhaps you are already quarreling with me in your minds because I have not come down to actual poets. There is one matter yet to be considered which is important to a right approach to poetry. I have on my shelves a volume entitled *Pure Poetry*. The book seems to have been born in a conversation between George Moore, Wal-

ter de la Mare, and John Freeman. They agreed upon the desirability of an anthology of poetry which is devoid of all subjectivity, and free from thought. But in the whole realm of English poetry they found for their anthology only seventy-five poems that met their requirements. Only in these few poems is there a work of pure imagination into which the poet has not obtruded some reflection of his own. Here you have an extreme position, of course; though with the main contention none of us would, I imagine, seriously quarrel. The highest poetry does go on the wings of imagination; and serious argumentation is an encumbrance to the flight. But I find myself skeptical of the validity of the extreme purism which this anthology reflects. A more immediate question for us ordinary folk, is, Should poetry aim to teach? I should say No. But it is well to remember that some of the great poems of the world have been propaganda, or have included propaganda, open and unashamed. In the *Divine Comedy* Dante has a gospel to preach, and he never forgets it. But he

wrote it first in order to celebrate Beatrice Portinari, to write "concerning her what had before not been written of any woman." The *Divine Comedy* is also a political tract, like some Old Testament prophecies: and it obviously was intended to serve a moral purpose. Whether the *Divine Comedy* would have been a greater poem if Dante had left out his preaching, I find it difficult to say. Doctor Johnson again and again insists that poetry and drama should have a moral aim. It is probably true to say, by and large, that poetry should not aim to preach or to teach; but that it will inevitably do so. Yet it will do so best when it least intends to. Having said this, I pause and wonder where Francis Thompson would have been if he had no gospel to preach, or where George Herbert or Richard Crashaw would have been, most of the time. It is a difficult question; and I have little wisdom. This, however, is sound counsel: don't go to the poets to learn a lesson or to have your mind or your morals improved. Go only to catch their inspiration.

If, then, we are to go to the poets to catch this inspiration, how shall we go about it? It is impossible for one man to lay down a rule for another, but I think there are two or three obvious things that must be said. We live most of our day in prose; and if we turn to poetry, we must needs adjust ourselves to a new world. By and large, it is also a more difficult world. Not only does the adjustment require effort, but after the adjustment has been made, the going is harder. Consequently, if you are tired, you are well advised not to take up a volume of poetry, unless it is poetry that you already know well and love. It would never do for you to begin to read Keats or Browning for the first time in that condition. You may, as I sometimes do at the end of a hard day, pick up an anthology and browse through its pages until you strike something into the mood of which you can readily enter; and in most good anthologies, you would be almost certain to find poems which invite you at once into their mood. But speaking generally, the reading of poetry

should be undertaken with a fresh mind, and also in circumstances of quietness. For good poetry requires close attention. "One cannot," says Mr. Bradby, "tear the heart out of a poem, as one can tear it out of a detective story, with a selective eye and a brisk turning of the pages. If we are to get from poetry the full enjoyment which it is capable of giving, we must know it intimately—I had almost said, by heart. Any great poem, even a short one, demands a close and careful study." Indeed, it is perfectly true that every new reading of a great poem reveals to you something that you had not seen before; and there are poems which only unfold to us their full wonder after repeated reading. To this let me add that you will do well to read them aloud, so that the magic and the music of the spoken word may be added to their appeal.

Besides all this, if you are to reach the inmost heart of the great poets, you have to approach them in an attitude of mind that is akin to prayer. If I am right in supposing that the spring of poetry is as-

piration, then it is by setting ourselves in the posture of aspiration that we shall fall into step with the poet. We shall have to spread out our own wings if we are to keep pace with the poet's flight. There is no other way.

In all this you will see that I am pleading that you take poetry seriously, and that you do not regard it as a mere escape from humdrum or treat it only as an ornament of life that can be dispensed with and need only be regarded in our idle hours. To possess ourselves of some portion of the infinite wealth of our poetical inheritance is one of the necessary disciplines of the soul: and no man can less forego this discipline than the preacher.

4

If you ask me what poets you should read, my answer is: Take your choice. Not all poets speak to all men; and a man has to find his own affinities. You need not fear that you will miss your man, unless, indeed, you have allowed your poetic instinct to grow torpid by disuse; in which

case I can only plead with you to take measures to reawaken it before it is too late. If your poetic sensibility is still alive, you have a great field to choose from. In the *Oxford Book of English Verse,* which covers the period from 1250 to 1900, there are poems quoted from nearly three hundred authors: and you will please remember that the anthologist was seeking only the best. It is a very remarkable circumstance, however you look at it, that in six hundred and fifty years there have been three hundred poets writing in English (besides a number whose names are not known) who have composed poetry which is able to pass the searching test of inclusion in an anthology picked by so discriminating a hand as that of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch. To be sure, these names are not all on the same plane. Shakespeare of course, stands alone, peerless. And among the high peaks are Geoffrey Chaucer, Edmund Spenser, John Milton, John Dryden, William Blake, Robert Burns, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Robert Browning, Tennyson, Walt Whitman, Swinburne

—to come no farther than the great Victorians. Here is a cluster of more modern names: Robert Bridges, W. E. Henley, John Davidson, Henry Newbolt, William Butler Yeats, George Russell (A. E.), Francis Thompson. There are also some women who are worthy of commemoration: Mrs. Hemans, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Christina Rosetti, Katherine Tynan, Alice Meynell, Dora Sigerson—and easily chief among them, Emily Dickinson. I shall not begin to name the younger poets; but there are not a few in whose work you will find "the living thing," the authentic note of inspiration; and some of the most notable of them are to be found on this continent. If there is any difficulty of choice, it is through sheer embarrassment of riches. Let me add that though I have mentioned only the names of the greater singers, you are not free to overlook the lesser voices. I confess that I have had some of my greatest moments with those whose place is relatively low down on Parnassus. It is well to remember, as one of the minor singers has reminded us, that

"Far better in its place the lowliest bird
Should sing aright to Him the lowliest song,
Than that a seraph strayed should take the word
And sing His glory wrong."

And some of our seraphs, like Swinburne, have strayed.

It is worth noticing, since we have already seen something of the affinity between prayer and poetry, that we have in English a remarkable wealth of religious and mystical poetry. There is actually an *Oxford Book of Mystical Verse.* I need only remind you of the names of John Milton, John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Crashaw, Henry Vaughan, John Keble, Coventry Patmore, Christina Rosetti, Francis Thompson. Most of these wrote poetry not obviously religious, it is true; but by and large their fame appears to survive chiefly by reason of their specific religious note. It would, however, be poor counsel to bid you start a study of English poetry with the religious and mystical poets as such. I think you will gain more from them, if you approach them after you are pretty well familiarized with the secular

poets. There is nothing out of place in adding a religious passion to a poetic impulse; but I think that to make yourself familiar first with the great religious poetry is to disable you to some extent from adjusting yourself to the lower pitch of secular poetry. If you are to know poetry, you must study it for the poetry, and not for the religion or any other interest that the poet has superimposed upon his muse.

There are some poets with whom I hope you will make yourselves familiar, if you are not so already. Of Shakespeare I will say nothing. He is a universe in himself, and to be well versed in him is to be richly educated. Some little time ago, during a space of enforced leisure, I read through the tragedies again: and I found myself more overwhelmed by them than ever before. Each reading gives one a new sense of the astonishing orbit of the poet's mind, a new wonder at his depth of insight and his mastery of the word, and an intenser sensibility to the tragic grandeur of life.

Of William Blake I should like to say a little more, for the reason that he has for

the last few years been one of the chief mainstays of my inner life. He was one of the many Englishmen of his day who sympathized with the revolt of the thirteen colonies, and one of his most notable utterances is a celebration of the War of Independence. That war, however, Blake saw, not as a mere struggle of groups of men; and its *venue* was not the soil of the colonies. The war he beheld was a titanic struggle of invisible powers, of whom the terrestrial actors were but symbols, and the battle was joined in some portentous no-man's-land between heaven and hell. He saw the struggle *sub specie æternitatis.* And in that poem he breaks out in a lyrical passage which belongs rightly to the classics of freedom:

"The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave their stations;
The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrappèd up;
The bones of death, the covering clay, the sinews shrunk and dryed
Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing, awakening,

Spring like redeemèd captives, when their bonds and bars are burst,
Let the slave grinding at the mill run out into the field,
Let him look up into the heavens and laugh in the bright air;
Let the enchainèd soul, shut up in darkness and in sighing,
Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years,
Rise and look out; his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open;
And let his wife and children return from the oppressor's scourge.
They look behind at every step and believe it is a dream,
Singing: 'The Sun has left his blackness, and has found a fresher morning,
And the fair Moon rejoices in the clear and cloudless night;
For Empire is no more, and now the Lion and the Wolf shall cease.' "

But you must begin with Blake rather earlier than his great "prophetic" works. The proper starting point is his *Songs of Innocence*. Here you stand in the unspoiled morning of the world, seen through the eyes of a child:

"When the green woods laugh with the voice of joy
And the dimpling stream runs laughing by;
When the air does laugh with our merry wit
And the green hill laughs with the noise of it."

And then you pass on to the *Songs of Experience,* where you find a maturer, more sophisticated view of the world, for something of its pain and sorrow and terror have invaded the soul:

"Tyger, Tyger, burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

"In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

"And what shoulder, and what art
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat
What dread hand? And what dread feet?

"When the stars threw down their spears
And watered heaven with their tears,
Did he smile his work to see?
Did He who made the Lamb make thee?"

Already in these lyrical beginnings you may trace the foreshadowing of the characteristic note of Blake. That is what we may call his specific other-worldliness. "I assert for myself," he says, "that I do not behold the outward creation; and that to me it is hindrance and not action. 'What,' it will be said, 'when the sun rises, do you not see a round disc of fire somewhat like a guinea?' Oh, no, no! I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host crying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty!' I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning sight. I look through it, not with it." Perhaps the revival of interest in Blake in the last few years springs from the very arrogance of his affirmation of the invisible. Here is a man who has no doubts. It is not merely that he sees in the rising sun what we do not see, and that he finds every object of sense transfigured with some seemingly farfetched significance, but that he tells us of moments in which his whole being had transcended the horizons of sense and had lived and moved within the un-

seen. It is this kind of experience which lies behind such lines as

> "To see a world in a grain of sand
> And a heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
> And eternity in an hour . . . ."

These lines are from a poem in couplets called "Auguries of Innocence"; and I am tempted, in order to whet your appetite, to go on a little—

> "A robin redbreast in a cage
> Puts all Heaven in a rage.
> A dovehouse filled with doves and pigeons
> Shudders Hell through all its regions.
> A dog starved at his master's gate
> Predicts the ruin of the state.
> A horse misused upon the road
> Calls to heaven for human blood.
> Each outcry of the hunted hare
> A fiber from the brain does tear.
> A skylark wounded in the wing,
> A cherubim does cease to sing . . . ."

And so on through a hundred lines more. But this is not the most characteristic of Blake. That appears in those poems which he calls his Prophecies: and these, it must

be admitted, are full of difficulty. There are in them large tracts of unconquerable obscurity; and it is improbable that we shall ever quite unravel the tangle of Blake's wild symbolism. He had been brought up on the Bible and Swedenborg, and to the end he had a Swedenborgian mind. "All the prophetic books," as Mr. Osbert Burdett has justly observed, "resolve themselves into variations on a single theme—the spiritual or imaginative impulse of life at war with the hindrances and restraints which the defective constitution of human beings or the pressure of society, law, morals, formal religion place upon it." Every element, every idea, every state of soul which entered into this conflict was embodied in a symbolical being; and Blake's symbolism grew unrestrainedly into a vast and confused mythology through which the most pertinacious student has not yet found a sure way and in which the ordinary reader gives himself up for lost. Yet there are in the Prophecies and in the most tangled thickets of his symbolism clearings of high translucent thought; and

these are themselves the sufficient reward of the toil and weariness of the road that leads to them.

The greatest of the Prophecies is his "Jerusalem." In this Blake has gathered up his whole mind entire. The famous song beginning "And did those feet in ancient time," and ending with

> "I shall not cease from mental fight
> Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
> Till we have built Jerusalem
> In England's green and pleasant land,"

is, however, not in the prophecy called "Jerusalem," but in another called "Milton." There are passages no less transporting in "Jerusalem." Listen to this as a description of the true Jerusalem:

> "Lo!
> The stones are Pity, and the bricks well wrought Affections,
> Enameled with Love and Kindness; and the tiles engraven gold,
> Labor of merciful hands—the beams and rafters are Forgiveness,
> The mortar and cement of the work, tears of Honesty; the nails

And the screws and iron braces are well wrought Blandishments,
And well-contrivèd words, firm-fixing, never forgotten,
Always comforting the remembrance; the floors Humility,
The ceilings Devotion, the hearths Thanksgiving."

And again:

"Why should Punishment weave the veil with iron wheels of War,
When Forgiveness might weave it with wings of cherubim?

"In my exchanges, every land
Shall walk; and mine in every land,
Mutual shall build Jerusalem,
Both heart in heart and hand in hand.

"Our wars are wars of life and wounds of love,
With intellectual spears and long-winged arrows of thought,
Mutual in one another's love and wrath all renewing,
We live as One Man . . . .
As One Man all the universal family; and that One Man
We call Jesus the Christ.

"I give you the end of a golden string
Only wind it into a ball;
It will lead you in at Heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem's wall."

For the last sixteen years Blake has meant more to my own view of the world and therefore to my whole life than any other writer of verse or prose in the English language. I warn you, it takes time and trouble to get into him and to tap the sources of his inspiration, but I have found it more than worth all the toil.

A more recent discovery for me has been the poems of Emily Dickinson. I have not time to discuss the work of this very remarkable woman. Apart from one or two fugitive pieces, I did not know of it until last fall, when I became possessed of the two volumes; and I have been astonished ever since at the way the poems have followed me, again and again rising unbidden to my mind and into my sermons. I take leave to quote one or two poems, again to whet your appetite, as I conclude:
This is a little song of faith:

"How brittle are the piers
On which our faith doth tread,
No bridge below doth totter so,
Yet none hath such a crowd.

"It is as old as God
Indeed, 'twas built by him
He sent his Son to test the plank,
And he pronounced it firm."[9]

And here is one of her love songs,

"It was a quiet way
He asked if I was his.
I made no answer of the
Tongue
But answer of the eyes.

"And then he bore me high
Before this mortal noise,
With swiftness as of chariots
And distance as of wheels.

"The world did drop away
As countries from the feet
Of him that leaneth in
Balloon
Upon an ether street

"The gulf behind was not—
The continents were new.
Eternity it was—before
Eternity was due.

"No seasons were to us;
It was not night nor
Noon;

For sunrise stopped upon
The place
And fastened it in dawn.

And this for a last word:

"Tis not *Revelation* that waits
But our unfurnished eyes"—

which recalls Francis Thompson's lines,

" 'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces
That miss the many-splendored thing!"[10]

CHAPTER IV

STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS

I

"THE History of the Valorous and Witty Knight-Errant, Don Quixote of La Mancha," should be one of the required readings in the education of a preacher. Not only is it one of the great books of the world, it is a profound commentary on the world to which the preacher is expected to address himself. Why Cervantes wrote the story is not clear. He may have intended a satire on the orders of chivalry and of the body of fantastic literature that seems to have grown about them. Some hold the opinion that it was written as an elaborate parody on the life of Saint Ignatius Loyola, whose biography was still a recent event when Cervantes was writing his book. Still another view is that Cervantes wrote as a believer and an admirer, proposing to convict the world of stupidity.

When the idealist flings himself against the intrenched evil of the world, he seems to the worldling to be tilting at windmills. There is, however, little in what we know of Cervantes to lend countenance to this last view. None the less, there is little doubt that when Cervantes wrote this book, he was possessed of a beneficent "daimon" and wrote better than he knew. For grotesque as Cervantes' portrait of Don Quixote is, the mad knight does by some magic, in the end, figure as a hero of tragedy.

Don Quixote, you will remember, called his old splay-hoofed nag Rosinante, thereby to apprise the world that it was the paragon of knightly mounts. He takes for his Dulcinea, the princess of his knightly service, a plain, ill-favored country wench. The fact outside his mind was manifestly but the peg on which to hang the fancy in his mind. He made an arbitrary jump from the world of sensations to the world of dreams—or perhaps we should say it was a jump in the opposite direction. But the story as it unfolds itself shows that a man cannot so wrench apart the world of sense

and the world of spirit, that he cannot turn a blind eye to the earthly fact, without making himself ridiculous, no matter how lofty, how imperious his ideal may be. Don Quixote, for all his fine chivalry and his noble passion for justice, is a tragi-comic figure, befooled by his confusion of worlds.

There is in all religion a tendency to deny the reality of this world, to suppose it to be a phantasmal and distressful universe into which by some sad mischance man has fallen; and it seems to become our only hope of peace that we deny its reality, much as the "Christian Scientist" of our day appears to do. For our salvation, we must withdraw ourselves from this world of matter-of-fact to the contemplation of a world that is at once within us and beyond us. Things are not what they seem. Don Quixote denied his old nag—and in his interior world it was transformed into the perfection of horseflesh. He denied the ugly wench—and in his dream she was born again the peerless princess of his loyalty. He denied the windmills and saw them as giants to be slain. That was the

world-denying mind carried *ad absurdum*. It is, of course, no trouble of ours. We do not doubt which is the real world. It is this familiar world of hard facts and hard cash, of bricks and mortar, of bread and cheese. We do indeed pay lip-service to the notion that the world we see is not all the world there is; but when any man among us takes that notion seriously and lets it interfere too extensively with the conduct of business, we are quick enough to call him a visionary fool. We are indeed leaning so far over from Don Quixote that we are in danger of falling backward and involving ourselves in a conclusion as decisive and as disastrous as his. For having seen and touched and handled and tasted the whole world, we may lose our own souls.

We moderns, like Don Quixote, believe that there is in some sort an essential antithesis of worlds—the world of spirit and the world of sense, the world of faith and the world of fact. Have we not heard it said loudly and often that religion has nothing to do with politics or with busi-

ness? When the Bishops and the Free Church leaders of England sought to compose the coal strike of 1927, were they not roundly and publicly bidden to mind their own business, since the coal industry lay outside the province of religion? Undoubtedly, Don Quixote would have agreed with their view, but with a difference. He would have said that business and religion have nothing to do with one another, but he would have added that religion is the real world and that business can wait. We, on the other hand, believe (even though we may not say it right out in meeting) that business comes first and that religion can wait. I do not say that Don Quixote was right. I believe he was wrong, but less disastrously wrong than we are. I suggest that the real truth lies in rejecting the dilemma and accepting both worlds; and that the business of religion is to enable us to live our one life in both worlds at the same time.

2

So much for Don Quixote. For the

moment, he has served his turn by confronting us with this dilemma of worlds, which seems to have vexed mankind from its beginnings and which is, whether consciously or unconsciously in the writers, one of the major preoccupations of literature. I propose to ask you to consider what witness literature bears to the nature of man, when we approach it from this point of view.

It is not long since Mr. Bertrand Russell told us that we should build our house of life on "a firm foundation of unyielding despair." For all our science, we have not discovered

> "the hills where our life rose
> And the sea where it goes."

We do not know whence we came or whither we go, or even whether we are going anywhere. This much alone seems certain: the universe is running down like a clock. The earth is growing colder; the time is coming when it will be uninhabitably cold. Life will perish, the last curtain will drop and the drama of life come

to its insignificant close. Life has no meaning, except that which we may impose upon it for a moment by our own effort and struggle. Mr. Russell is only the most brilliant of our pessimists; nor is this mood a recent arrival. As far back as the eighteen-nineties we can see it invading the minds of reflective folk. One interesting symptom of its growing influence is to be found in the vogue of Omar Kháyyám in and around that decade. For this was virtually the gospel of Omar:

"Some for the Glories of this World; and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
Ah, take the Cash, and let the Credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant Drum!

. . . . . .

"Into this universe, and *Why* not Knowing,
Nor *Whence,* like Water willy-nilly flowing;
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not *Whither,* willy-nilly blowing.

. . . . . .

"A Moment's Halt—a momentary taste
Of BEING from the Well amid the Waste—
And lo!—the phantom Caravan has reached
The NOTHING it set out from—Oh, make haste!"

Omar's "Rubáiyát," in Fitzgerald's trans-

lation, was first published in 1859; a second edition was not called for until 1868. The fifth edition appeared in Fitzgerald's *Collected Works* in 1889; but between 1889 and 1899 the poem was reprinted no less than fifteen times. That, I suggest, is a fair index to the mind of the time. And if Shelley is right in saying that the writers of a period must reflect "the spirit of the age," then we ought to find this particular tendency not only in the reading but in the writing of the eighteen-nineties.

Wilson MacDonald, the Canadian poet, in a poem in which he lays violent hands upon Haeckel, goes on to affirm:

"Science has slain all the gods; but the poets
Have lifted them back to their thrones in the heavens."

As a matter of fact, most of the poets of the century's end were beaten to a standstill. I well remember the days when Haeckel's *Riddle of the Universe* in a sixpenny edition was being sold by the thousands in Great Britain; and of the poets who caught the public ear in those times,

there were very few but sang in a minor key. Thomas Hardy, in the introduction to *Late Lyrics and Earlier* (1922), defends himself against the charge of pessimism that had been laid against him; but the poems that follow do little to substantiate the defense. Hardy to the end lived under the gray clouded sky of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles.* The last word of Mr. A. E. Housman (1922)—

> "To-morrow, more's the pity,
> Away we both must fly,
> To air, the ditty,
> To earth, I"—

is virtually the same as his first (1895). Perhaps in none did the prevailing mood reach a more tragic depth than it did in the unfortunate Ernest Dowson:

> "No man knoweth our desolation;
> Memory pales of the old delight,
> While the sad waters of separation
> Bear us on to the ultimate night."

There is no need to multiply examples. James Thomson, Herbert Trench, John Davidson, and others besides swelled the

desperate chorus, though its final outcome varied from poet to poet. Here it was courage, there surrender, and there again defiance. There were others, to be sure, who sang a song of faith and hope—Francis Thompson, for instance, who sang well-intrenched in his Catholic mysticism and seems not to have asked any of the questions that troubled his contemporaries. In the main the poets of that time found themselves prisoners without hope in a doomed world—the conclusion of the logic of scientific materialism. Save for a few belated voices, there is reason to believe that this dismal phase is past.

3

An epidemic of skepticism, with pessimism supervening, is no new thing in the world. There was such an epidemic in the later phases of Greek thought. At its heydey, under Plato and Aristotle, Greek philosophy was much occupied with the perfect commonwealth. But when Philip of Macedon had made an end of the Athenian state, the philosophers seem to have lost

their interest in the commonwealth and become preoccupied with themselves. Of this the fruit was Stoicism and Epicureanism. It does not belong to our business to tell how and why Stoicism and Epicureanism were tried and at last found wanting. So it happened, and thereupon came a time when men began to say to each other: "Give it up. What is the use of knocking at a door which is not there? The way to peace is to stop thinking. You cannot solve the riddle of the universe. Why, then, vex yourself about it?" So the high and generous faith of Plato had ended in this bleak skepticism, which was, indeed, sheer capitulation and despair. But here comes in one Posidonius, and he says to his contemporaries: "Come, it is not as bad as all that. It is true that we cannot solve the riddle of the universe or divine the meaning of life. But the universe is not a bad place, after all. Wise men will be reconciled to their lot and make the best of it. They will not go on beating their wings against the bars of their cage; they will try to settle down comfortably in it." And then to en-

courage them, he teaches them history, physics and geography, presumably to show them what a beautiful cage it really was. Posidonius lived and taught, says Mr. Edwyn Bevan, in order to "make men feel at home in the universe."

And so the centuries meet. Posidonius tells his fellows that they should make the best of a bad job and persuades them to make themselves at home in their world. Mr. Bertrand Russell bids this generation do the same thing; and his excursions into ethics and education are by way of showing us how to do it. But that is precisely what man cannot do. Certainly, he cannot do so long, however much he may want to. Walt Whitman would have liked to do so—you will no doubt recall the well-known passage in his "Song of Myself."

"I think I could turn and live with the animals, they
are so placid and self-contained;
I stand and look at them long and long,
They do not sweat and whine about their condition,
They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their
sins,
They do not make me sick, discussing their duty to
God."

There is a fine gusto here, certainly. But Walt Whitman, who knew so much, clearly did not altogether know the self he sang so lustily. It is no doubt a quiet life down in the meadow, for the cattle have come to terms with their world and are at home in the universe. But Walt Whitman could not be at home in such a world, and still be Walt Whitman. There is a theory that the poet in the act of composing a poem is endeavoring to purge his inner man of some disharmony; and that theory seems to apply here. Just because, for all his bravado, Walt Whitman was at odds with his world, he wrote poetry. If he could have attained to the placidity and the contentment which he admired in cows, he would never have written another line. Walt Whitman could write a poem about a cow, but never a cow could write a poem about Walt Whitman. It seems to be true of Walt Whitman and of every living soul, that there is something within him which refuses to fit comfortably into this world of sense. There is a chafing which cannot be removed save by choking and killing that which makes a man a man

and not a head of cattle. Walt Whitman was trying to escape from that chafing by writing poetry. There is alleviation, no doubt, but no escape that way.

4

Now, of the unrest, you will find many signs in literature. Let me give you a few instances that I have stumbled upon in some recent reading. Now and again I pick up the diary of that sensitive but skeptical soul, Amiel; and the other day I opened the book at a page in which Amiel speaks of a morning spent in a scene of great beauty. "These delicious moments," he writes, "impress me indescribably. They intoxicate me; they carry me away. I feel beguiled out of myself, dissolved in sunbeams, breezes, perfumes, and sudden impulses of joy. And yet all the time I pine for I know not what intangible Eden."

Here is a passage from Katharine Mansfield's *Letters:* "I've just finished my new book. Finished last night at 10.30. Laid down my pen after writing 'Thanks be to God.' I wish there was a God. I am long-

ing (1) to praise him, (2) to thank him." This is another: "Does your soul trouble you? Mine does, I feel that only now do I desire to be saved. I realize what salvation means; and I long for it. Of course I am not speaking as a Christian or about a personal God. But the feeling is, 'I believe (and very much), help thou mine unbelief.' But it is to myself, I cry—to the spirit, to the essence of me—that which lives in Beauty. Oh these *words!*" This, as you know, is from Shelley:

"We look before and after
And pine for what is not,
Our sincerest laughter
With some pain is fraught,
Our sweetest songs are those that tell
Of saddest thought."

And this from Sir William Watson:

"In this home with starry dome,
Floored with gemlike lakes and seas,
Shall I never be at home,
Never wholly at my ease?"

The next passage is not confession, but commentary. Mr. Charles du Bos, a French

critic, in writing of Baudelaire, a poet of doubtful report among us, says, "Everything in Baudelaire is a function of his genius; and there was nothing that that genius could less do without than God, a God who is a receptacle of prayer rather than an object of faith—I was on the point of saying, a God to whom one could pray without believing in him. One recalls the saying of Flaubert, 'I am at bottom a mystic and I believe nothing.'"

If you were to go through the books you read—I do not mean the specialist books, theological and the like—and copy out the passages in which you find this note, you would be astonished what a lengthy catena you might compile in a few months. Sometimes the note is overborne by a show of courage or of gayety—for grace is not denied to men to show a brave front to their distresses—and you may sometimes miss it. Some sheltered souls there are too who escape the heat of the conflict. But no man who observes the life of men or sees it in the mirror of literature can reach any other conclusion than that to which Pascal came.

He had read deep into the hearts of men, and deepest of all into his own; and what he read there he wrote down in the book of his *Thoughts,* which you should make haste to read, if it is not already known to you. You will find Pascal's verdict in the first part, under the heading, "The Misery of Man Without God." "Some men," writes George J. Romanes, a great British biologist (who died in 1894), in a passage of autobiography which occurs in his book, *Thoughts on Religion,* wherein he recants his former skepticism, "are not conscious of the cause of this misery; this, however, does not prevent the fact of their being miserable. For the most part they conceal the fact as well as possible from themselves by occupying their minds with society, sport, frivolity of all kinds, or, if intellectually disposed, with science, art, religion, business. This, however, is but to fill the starving belly with husks. I know from experience the intellectual distractions of scientific research, philosophical speculation, and artistic pleasures, but am also well aware that even when all are taken together

and well sweetened to taste, in respect of consequent reputation, means, social position, the whole concoction is but as high confectionery to a starving man. He may cheat himself for a time, especially if he be a strong man, that he is nourishing himself by denying his natural appetite; but soon finds that he was made for some altogether different kind of food, even though of much less tastefulness as far as the palate is concerned. Some men, indeed, never acknowledge this, articulately or distinctly even to themselves. Take, for example, 'that last infirmity of noble minds.' I suppose the most exalted and least 'carnal' of worldly joys lies in the adequate recognition by the world of high achievement by ourselves. Yet it is notorious that

> 'It is by God decreed
> Fame shall not satisfy the highest need.'

It has been my lot to know not a few of the famous men of our generation, and I have always observed that this is profoundly true. Like all other 'moral' satisfactions, this soon palls by custom, and as

soon as one end of distinction is reached, another is pined for. There is no finality to rest in, while disease and death are always standing in the background. Custom may even blind men to their misery, so far as not to make them realize what is wanting; yet the want is there." The name of the late Viscount Haldane, statesman and philosopher, is not unknown to you. He lived a life of unremitting toil and gave his country distinguished public service. Save for one unfortunate interval during the war—one of those collapses of public judgment inevitable in the hysteria of war—he was held in high honor by his countrymen; and few of the prizes open to a public man but fell to him. "So far," he writes in his *Autobiography,* "as external circumstances are concerned, I would not, if I could, take the chance of living life over again. A distinguished living statesman and man of the world once asked me whether, even with the aid of such knowledge as experience had brought, I would like to try to begin life anew. My answer was in the negative, 'For,' I added,

'we are apt greatly to underrate the part which accident and good luck have really played in the shaping of our careers and giving us such successes as we have had.' His rejoinder was to the same effect as my answer to his question. 'I would not,' he said, 'myself try again, for I do not feel sure that good fortune, irrational as it has been, would attend me in the same way.'"[11] From which it would appear that even these two lives, completely successful in a secular view, had a skeleton in the cupboard. Their words bewray them. They suffered from a fear of life, for apparently both, and certainly one of them, believed that the issues of life are an affair only of time and circumstance, and life done, the story is closed forever.

"La vie est vaine
Un peu d'amour
Un peu de haine . . .
Et puis—bon jour!

"La vie est brève
Un peu d'espoir
Un peu de rêve . . . .
Et puis—bon soir!"

And so it runs,

> "We look before and after
> And sigh for what is not."

It is this sense, sublime and tragic at once, of lack and loss and frustration which persists in an unsilenced undertone in all great secular literature. It is the intolerable feeling that our reach must always exceed our grasp. We have heard a rumor of eternity, but how shall we know the way? We travel but without hope of arrival. This is what that noble and prophetic Spaniard of our time, Miguel de Unamuno, calls "the tragic sense of life," of which, according to him, the story of Don Quixote is the immortal parable. "I sigh," says one; "I pine," says another; "I long," says the third; "Delight no more, oh never more," cries a fourth. We hunger for food; and there is bread for our hunger. We thirst, and there is water to drink. But for this hunger, this thirst, there is no provender in sight. That is the "tragic sense of life." Over against this, Posidonius propounds that we should make ourselves at home in

the universe, and forget the rest; and Mr. Bertrand Russell bids us build our house of life upon "a firm foundation of unyielding despair." It is entirely safe to say that we never shall. There is a little drawing of William Blake's in which a little man stands at the foot of a ladder that reaches the moon, and cries, "I want, I want." Blake intended the drawing as a comment upon human nature. For him man was an insatiate, incarnate want, an embodied hunger. When all the wants are supplied that this world provides for, man is still crying, "I want"; and he will go on crying it in the face of all the bleak skepticisms and the hopeless negations of the wise. Like the proverbial Irishman, he does not know what he wants and he will not be happy till he gets it. You may take it for certain that he will go on looking for it. For not only has he heard a rumor of eternity, but there is also a report that some have found it.

Before we consider that report, however, there are one or two matters on which I desire to dwell for a little. I have used

the word "tragic," and I am anxious that you do not mistake the sense in which I here use the word. In our loose habit of speech we use "tragic" as the synonym of calamitous. But there may be calamity without tragedy, though there may not be tragedy without some kind of calamity. The substance of tragedy is a matter which has been much discussed; and it is not for me to obtrude my inexpert judgment on you. There is one point which must be made in order to justify our use of the word "tragic" in our present discussion. And since we are confining our attention in the main to English literature, I will venture to appeal to an acknowledged master to elucidate the matter for us. In his great work on *Shakespearean Tragedy,* Mr. A. C. Bradley, after speaking of the "forces which act in the human spirit, whether good or bad, whether personal passion or impersonal principle; doubts, desires, scruples, ideas—whatever can animate, shake, possess and drive a man's soul,"[12] goes on to say: "In Shakespearean tragedy some such forces are shown in conflict. They

are shown acting in men and generating strife between them. They are also shown, less universally but quite as characteristically, generating disturbance and even conflict in the soul of the hero. Treasonous ambition in Macbeth collides with loyalty and patriotism in Macduff and Malcolm; here is the outward conflict. But these powers and principles equally collide in the soul of Macbeth himself. Here is the inner conflict. And neither by itself could make the tragedy." There is much more than this to be said (and Mr. A. C. Bradley says it) in the analysis of tragedy as we find it in Shakespeare. But I invite you to consider here only the "inner conflict" which is an essential ingredient of tragedy. That conflict is in all of us—between the better and baser selves which indwell us; and it reaches its most poignant expression in the conflict of loyalties. There are times in life when truth and love are at odds, when justice and mercy cannot agree, when friendship and integrity pull us in opposite ways. There is the raw material of tragedy. How it works out depends upon the cir-

cumstances and our own choice. Some of you no doubt know something of the love story of that frail figure of grace and genius, Emily Dickinson. Little indeed is certainly known of it, for she kept her own counsel concerning it, though we may gather its substance from her letters and poems. But love came to Emily Dickinson and overwhelmed her. The lover, a man already married, besought her to go away with him. Those are the elements of the story. Honor and Love were at grips; and Honor won the field. But at what tremendous cost, one of her verses tells,

> "I took one draught of life—
> I'll tell you what I paid;
> Precisely an existence,
> The market price, they said."

Such conflicts as these are the projections into the single life of that dilemma of worlds which underlies our discussion. There are values terrestrial, and values celestial; and these sometimes converge in an inward crisis, which, however it is resolved, is not resolved without loss. So that

"the flight after the unattainable" when it is a caged bird that essays the flight is rightly described as a tragic thing. You forswear the goods of earth without guarantee of heaven; or you forfeit heaven because you try (and sometimes think you have succeeded) to make yourself at home in the world.

The other matter which I wish to dwell upon awhile is the search that man has made for the elusive thing that he so sorely wants. He has never been quite sure about the nature of what he wants—whether it be a father or a friend or a home or some mystical elixir of life. On the intellectual side men have called it the Absolute, the Logos, Reality; while to the poetic imagination it has been the Holy Grail, the Crock of Gold, the Pearl of Great Price. You know the names of some of the places in which the treasure has been reported to be hidden. Mandeville, the old traveler, tells us of an island named Bragman, on which "was no Thief, nor Murderer, nor common Woman, nor poor Beggar, nor ever was man slain in that country. And because they be so true

and righteous and so full of good conditions, they were never grieved with Tempests, nor with Thunder, nor with Lightning, nor with Hail, nor with Pestilence, nor with War, nor with Hunger, nor with any Tribulation, as we be many times amongst us for our sins." Mr. H. M. Tomlinson, reflecting on the story, says that this island is "one of the Hesperides, or the Fortunate Isles or the Isles of the Blessed."[18] "Some name it Eden or Elysium. . . . Every man has his dream of such a sanctuary and every community its legend because in our hearts we are sure the world is not good enough for us. Even the South Sea Islanders have word of a better place, the asylum they have never reached in all their thousand years of wandering from east to west about the Pacific. Perhaps man goes to war or seeks pleasure with abandonment merely, because, at interavls, he becomes desperately disappointed in his search for what is not of this earth. But what does that suggest? We only know that the supreme artists appear to have been privileged as was Moses with a sight of a coast,

glorious but remote, and that the memory of that unattainable vision gives to their music and verse the melancholy and the golden sonority which to us, and we do not know why, are the indisputable sign of their greatness." "We do not know why." Do we not? Is there no such thing as deep that calleth to deep? Does not the heart know its own longing, when a greater heart tells it in music or song? We are longing for a life of peace and freedom and harmony which this world of sense cannot afford us, and we know not where to find it. And the "melancholy" and the "golden sonority" which belong to great poetry are at once the sign of the height of the vision and of the insufficiency of the poet's wings. In this longing for wholeness and harmony of life is also the spring of that preoccupation with the ideal commonwealth which has brought forth the literature of Utopia. In Christendom the imaginative quest of the perfect home chiefly addressed itself to the finding of an idealized Jerusalem—whether Saint Bernard's *"urbs Syon aurea"* or William Blake's "Jerusalem," which should be built

in "England's green and pleasant land." It has had other names—the Republic, the City of God, the New Atlantis, the City of the Sun, and Erewhon; but under all the names is the same dream of that to which Josiah Royce gave the most beautiful of its names—"The Beloved Community."

5

It has not been my intention to supply the materials of an exordium for a notable sermon. I have, however, done so. And I might as well now tell you what the text should be. It is that noble passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things make it manifest that they are seeking after a country of their own. . . . But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly; wherefore God is not ashamed of them, to be their God: for he hath prepared for them a city." It was said (by Mr. Van Wyck Brooks, if

I remember rightly) of that tragic spirit Randolph Bourne that he was "smitten with an unappeasable nostalgia for a Beloved Community on the far side of Socialism." "On the far side of Socialism" is well said; for the Beloved Community is no affair of economics. But we are all smitten with Randolph Bourne's homesickness. The affliction differs in acuteness from man to man; but except a man have silenced the ache by his own will, no man but is so afflicted. The long and short of the matter is that we are for better or for worse so made that we cannot be at home in the universe; and the greater writers are the voices of this universal homesickness.

It may be indeed, as some would persuade us, that this nostalgia is at bottom a memory, a memory so dimmed that we may trace none of its features with certainty. Mr. Chesterton speaks of "the sublime sense of loss that is in the very soul of all great poetry and nowhere more so than in the poetry of pagans and skeptics . . . which cries against all prigs and progressives, out of the very depths and abysses of

the broken heart of man that happiness is not only a hope but also in some strange manner a memory, and that we are all Kings in exile." Recent anthropological study has yielded some circumstances which appear to confirm this view and which suggest that the story of the Fall may yet have to be taken seriously, not, indeed, in its form but in its substance. We may have to conclude that the story preserves a racial memory of a moment when mankind or some important part of it took a wrong turning and involved itself in what Newman called "a terrible aboriginal catastrophe." The "Golden Age" of Hesiod and Ovid may have to be removed from the realm of myth and read as a faintly remembered tale of a day that once was, when peace and happiness were the common lot of man. Be that as it may, whether we are troubled by a dim, far-off memory or an undeciphered longing, there can be no question of our *malaise*. On the very day on which these lines were written I found a critic summarizing the finding of Doctor Freud in his most recent work and telling

how he "dissects modern civilization only to question at the end whether all its strivings and achievements are worth the trouble they cost. Their blessings, he finds, are counterbalanced by the harm they do to the mind and heart of mankind. He questions whether the whole race has not grown neurotic under cultural influences and, in fact, whether civilization itself is not a community-neurosis." Doctor Freud has shown himself an adept in making bricks with meager straw; and we need not take his diagnosis too seriously. But there is no denying the symptoms—they are written large and deep in the statistics of insanity and suicide. For myself, I judge rather that this contemporary world is sick because of its unbelief. It is denying itself its appointed nutriment. It has accepted, more or less consciously, the view that this is a closed-in world and it has in consequence ceased to use that way of escape into a more spacious universe which we call religion. The late Canon Barnett once said that the modern Jew is Jacob without the ladder. With no less truth he might have

added that the modern Gentile also is Jacob without the ladder. Even if he has not actually lost the ladder, he imagines that someone has removed it. So we are left at the end of the day with an aching question to which we can find no answer in ourselves. In our darkest moments of failure and sorrow and frustration there is a muffled cry within us greater than we can utter. Even when our cup of joy has been full to the brim it leaves an aftertaste of sadness and foreboding. For all our brave show and fine feathers, we live under a cloud; and we know neither what it is nor by what method we may chase it away.

The other day, I read in a learned book —I take care to say that the book is a learned one, for the thing I read sounds so naïve that you might suppose it to have been written by a simpleton if you were not otherwise informed—that "if a question can be put at all, then it *can* be answered." Can we put this question that is implicit in the universal nostalgia? Is it possible to cast these longings and pinings and sighings into a form of words? Where the poets

have not succeeded, it would be foolish for a pedestrian to try. But there is a question raised which any man can put. Is there anything there—at the back of the North Wind? Is there anybody there? Is there a *there* at all? Or is it merely a "nowhere" whose "news" are fancies? Is this little world, which, little as we are, is manifestly not big enough for us, all the world there is? It is just this that takes the heart out of us—that this world of unfulfilled longing, this world of broken beauty, this world of frustration and death is the beginning and end of everything and that our eyes shall never behold perfection. And so we ask, Is there anything or anybody on the far side of our horizon? And if there be, what or who?

You will remember that I said the context of the Bible was the body of humane letters. The Bible is but meagerly understood except it be read in the light of that self-revealing of man which literature is. I venture now to add that the Bible is the complement to literature. For the Bible purports to give the answer to the question

which we find implicit in literature, and it reports the answer as it has been heard by men at various times. *What* is over there? The Bible answers, Eternity. *Who* is over there? The Bible answers, God. Literature asks the old aching question: the Bible reports the divine answer: "I am the Alpha and the Omega," saith the Lord God, "the Almighty who is, who was, who is to come."

Now, you will perhaps charge me with preaching. Perhaps you are right. But I make no apology for referring to the Bible when I am speaking of literature to preachers. For clearly it falls within my task to show how this body of literature which we call the Bible and other literature, *litteræ humaniores,* bear upon each other and wherein they differ. You will not, I trust, suspect me of holding any occult doctrine of the origin of Holy Writ, but I do hold it to have an orientation different from that of literature as a whole; and on its pages you do meet men who with singular confidence profess to have heard the answer to the question which the rest of

literature is asking. As Emily Dickinson says in one of her letters, of one of these men: "Paul knew the Man who knew the news." There is much in Karl Barth's mind to which mine does not consent, but I verily believe that we might with profit consider whether his view of the Bible may not have some significance for our contemporary need: "It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men. The Bible tells us not how we should speak to God, but what God says to us; not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us; not the right relation in which we must place ourselves to him, but the covenant which he has made with all who are Abraham's spiritual children and which he has sealed once for all in Jesus Christ." For myself I should prefer to say these things rather differently, but I commend Barth's main intention to your very serious thought. This is not to say that you will not find the word of man in Holy Writ or the word of God in humane letters. You

most assuredly will. But the distinction of the Bible as a whole is that it claims to utter the divine affirmative to the agonized questioning of the human soul: and the circumstance that the Bible holds its place so tenaciously in the attention of mankind after so long a time is at least some presumption that its claim is no empty one.

6

Among those who have given us literature bearing the hallmark of authentic inspiration, do any report some such discovery as the Bible announces? Have any of the great writers found the pearl of great price? Have they not only seen afar off the shining towers of the City of God but also set foot in it, though but for a fleeting moment? Does Literature offer any answer to its own question? We have seen how this world calls out to that. But does *that* world ever send out an answering signal? We shall not expect of any so much as to tell us that they have finally arrived. It will be enough that they shall have such solid assurance of being on the way that

the sense of loss and frustration has given way to confidence and peace. It would be easy to find evidence which might fairly be questioned on the ground that the poet or the writer started out with a religious conviction and therefore reached a religious conclusion. On this ground we should have to rule out Milton and Crashaw, and mystical poets like George Herbert and Henry Vaughan. What we must look for is the poet who is stating his faith and his experience, not the religious man who is preaching in verse, however exalted the verse may be.

The modern classic of this kind is too long for quotation—it is, of course, Francis Thompson's "Hound of Heaven." There, as you remember, the soul is shown to us seeking its fulfillment, but seeking it in nature: the starry heavens, in the eyes of little children, in human love—everywhere but in the one place where it might find it. Yet all the time the Eternal Love was pursuing it; and when the soul was in the extremity of its own failure, the Hound overtakes its quarry and brings it down:

"Now of that long pursuit
Comes on at hand the bruit:
That Voice is round about me like a bursting sea.
'And is thy earth so marred
Shattered in shard on shard?
Lo, all things fly thee, for thou fliest Me!'
. . . . . .
" 'Whom wilt thou find to love ignoble thee
Save Me, save only Me!
. . . . . .
All which I took from thee, I did but take,
Not for thy harms,
But just that thou mightst seek it in My arms.
All which thy child's mistake
Fancies as lost, I have stored for thee at home:
Rise, clasp My hand and come!'

"Halts by me that footfall;
Is my gloom, after all,
Shade of His hand, outstretched caressingly?
'Ah, fondest, blindest, weakest,
I am He whom thou seekest!
Thou dravest love from thee, who dravest Me!"

And the other side of the picture is given in another poem. He who once had sought the Sufficient Love in vain in the world about him now finds that world full of his Lord:

"Ay, if men say that on all high heaven's face
The saintly signs I trace
Which round my stolèd altars hold their solemn place,
Amen, Amen! For oh, how could it be
When I with wingèd feet had run
Through all the windy earth about
Quested its secret of the sun
And heard what things the stars together shout—
I should not heed thereout
Consenting counsel won:
By this, O Singer, know we if thou see
When men shall say to thee, Lo Christ is here;
When men shall cry to thee, Lo! Christ is there,
Believe them; yea, and this: then art thou seer,
When all thy crying clear
Is but: Lo here, lo there—ah, me, lo everywhere."

Such an experience Edna St. Vincent Millay also tells:

"O God, I cried, no dark disguise
Can e'er hereafter hide from me
Thy radiant identity!
Thou canst not move across the grass
But my quick eyes will see thee pass,
Nor speak, however silently,
But my hushed voice will answer thee.
I know the path that tells thy way
Through the cool eve of every day.
God, I can push the grass apart
And lay my finger on thy heart!"[14]

Listen again to Gerald Gould:

"He found my house upon the hill,
I made the bed and swept the floor
And labored solitary, till
He entered at the open door.

"He sat with me to break my fast,
He blessed the bread and poured the wine,
And spoke such friendly words, at last
I knew not were they his or mine.

"But only, when he rose and went
And left the twilight in the door,
I found my hands were more content
To make a bed and sweep a floor."[15]

It is inevitable that we should hear this note in Emily Dickinson:

"It was too late for man,
But early yet for God,
Creation impotent to help
But prayer remained our side.

"How excellent the heaven
When earth cannot be had:
How hospitable, then, the face
Of our old neighbor God!"

This last is by Digby Mackworth Dolben, who died a lad of nineteen:

"I asked for Peace—
My sins arose
And bound me close,
I could not find release.

"I asked for Truth—
My doubts came in
And with their din
They wearied all my youth.

"I asked for Love—
My lovers failed
And griefs assailed
Around, beneath, above.

"I asked for Thee—
And thou didst come
To take me home
Within thy heart to be."

Clearly these singers have heard the divine affirmative in their own souls.

CHAPTER V

THE WORDS OF THE PREACHER

I

YOU have probably never heard of Owen Felltham; I will make a clean breast of it and confess that neither had I, until I came upon him in that rich treasury of good things, *The Oxford Book of English Prose*. There I learned that he died some two years after the Great Fire of London, a man of sixty or thereabout, and therefore a contemporary of Cromwell and Milton. Besides this, I know nothing about him save that he wrote a passage of prose, which stands to his name in the book and which, you will agree, makes a most excellent introduction to the subject of this chapter. Here it is:

The excess which is in the defect of preaching has made the pulpit slighted; I mean the much bad oratory we find it guilty of. 'Tis a wonder to me how men can preach so little, and so long; so long a time, and so little matter; as if they thought to please by the

inculcation of their vain Tautologies. I see no reason that so high a Princess as *Divinity* is, should be presented to the people in the sordid rags of the tongue; nor that he which speaks from the *Father of Languages* should deliver his embassage in an ill one. A man can never speak too well while he speaks not too obscure. Long and distended clauses are both tedious to the ear and difficult for their retaining. A Sentence well couched takes both the sense and the understanding. I love not those Cart-rope speeches that are longer than the memory of man can fathom. I see not but that *Divinity*, put into apt significants, might ravish as well as poetry. The weighty lines men find upon the Stage, I am perswaded, have been the lures to draw away the Pulpit's followers. We complain of drowziness at a Sermon; when a Play of a doubled length leads us on still with alacrity. But the fault is not all in ourselves. If we saw *Divinity* acted, the gesture and variety would as much invigilate. But it is too high to be personated by Humanity . . . .

A good orator should pierce the ear, allure the eye, and invade the mind of his hearer. And this is *Seneca's* opinion: fit words are better than fine ones; I like not those that are injudiciously made; but such as be expressively significant, that lead the mind to something beside the naked term. And he that speaks thus must not look to speak thus every day. A *kembed* Oration will cost both sweat and the rubbing of the brain. And *kembed* I wish it, not *frizzled* nor *curled*. *Divinity* should not lasciviate.[16]

From this you will gather that things were not well with the pulpit in those days. But I take leave to wonder whether in respect of Owen Fellthams complaint things have ever been much better. For, as he says, if the language of the preacher is such as it should be, he "must not look to speak thus every day." For that kind of speech requires pains, and to take pains is also to take time. And there's the rub. Since in these days it seems to have become the rule that the preacher must also be a jack-of-all-trades to the community, the community must be content on Sunday morning with a hurried salad of commonplaces dressed in such improvised speech as the preacher can put together in the few and brief interstices of time that are left to him by his multitudinous engagements. But these things ought not so to be. If we are still to preach the gospel, we must have time to make not only our matter but our manner of speech worthy of the gospel. And it is not to be forgotten that there have been men who have stood in the pulpit and preached sermons which still live on as literature. Even

if we hardly dare aspire to so great eminence, it should never cease to be a point of honor with us that we take pains to find "fit words" for the great matters that are in our care.

In Owen Felltham's youth there was one of those preachers whose sermons survive as literature. This was John Donne, poet as well as preacher. Mr. Logan Pearsall Smith has done a good service, especially to preachers, if they but knew it, by publishing a selection of passages from John Donne's *Sermons*.* In his introduction, he summarizes Donne's own ideas of the preaching office. "Donne, indeed, often makes use of musical metaphors when he speaks of preaching: the preacher is, he says, a watchman placed on a high tower to sound a trumpet; his preaching was the trumpet voice, it was thunder, it was the beating of a drum, the tolling of a bell of mourning; it was a lovely song, sung to an instrument; the preacher should not speak

*He has recently made us still more his debtors by doing the same service in respect of Jeremy Taylor in *The Golden Grove*.

with uncircumcised lips or an extemporized or irreverent or over homely and vulgar language; his style should be modeled on that of the Holy Ghost, who in penning the Scriptures 'delights himself not only with a propriety but with a delicacy and harmony and melody of language, with height of metaphors and other figures which may make greater impression on the readers.'"[17] It is in this high and august temper that John Donne followed his calling; no wonder that, as Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch says, his sermons contain "the most significant prose ever uttered from the English pulpit, if not the most significant prose ever spoken in our tongue," and that he was "master of well-knit argument, riding tumultuous emotions as with a bridle, sending out fugue upon fugue of prose modulated with almost impeccable ear." Donne, the same writer adds, was "one of the tribe of strong generative giants." But Donne was Donne, after all, a man cast by nature in a great mold and then transfigured by grace. Nevertheless, we of a lesser breed may not impossibly acquire something of Donne's mas-

siveness and grandeur, if only we learn to conceive our office with the same gravity and to apply ourselves to it with the same passion as he did. Certainly, we should be saved from the entirely damnably modern tendency to cheapen and to vulgarize religion in the pulpit by the use of *argot,* street slang, journalese, and "smart-Aleck" locutions.

Donne had a contemporary whom Mr. T. S. Eliot inclines to rank more highly than Donne. This is Lancelot Andrewes, once Bishop of Winchester, whose volume of *Private Prayers,* that classic of devotional intelligence, I trust you know and treasure. In this debate I will not join. My purpose is to persuade you that preaching the gospel in pure English speech is justified by noble exemplars. "To persons," says Mr. Eliot, "whose minds are habituated to feed on the vague jargon of our time, when we have a vocabulary for everything and exact ideas about nothing—when a word half understood, torn from its place in some alien or half-formed science, as of psychology, conceals from

both the writer and reader the utter meaninglessness of a statement; when all dogma is in doubt except the dogmas of sciences which we have read in the newspapers; when the language of theology itself, under the influence of an undisciplined mysticism of popular philosophy, tends to become a language of tergiversation—Andrewes may seem pedantic and verbal. It is only when we have saturated ourselves with his prose, followed the movement of his thought, that we find this examination terminating in the ecstacy of assent. Andrewes takes a word and derives the world from it, squeezing and squeezing the word until it yields a full juice of meaning that we should never have supposed any word to possess."[18] Mr. Eliot admits no higher prose in sermons than that of Lancelot Andrewes, save only that of John Henry Newman. We who have read Newman's *Apologia* with understanding and vigilance have known him for a master of prose. But that same prose he did not confine to the written word. You will find it in the spoken word no less heightened in pulpit delivery by the passion

of its purpose. Newman is accessible to you; and I trust that you will not leave unread the *Apologia* and "The Idea of a University," for the matter and for the manner of both. But I will venture to quote to you Newman's own notes on the writing of sermons, dated 1868.

1. A Man should be in earnest, by which I mean he should write not for the sake of the writing, but to bring out his thoughts.

2. He should never aim at being eloquent.

3. He should keep his idea in view, and should write sentences over and over again till he has expressed his meaning accurately, forcibly, and in few words.

4. He should aim at being understood by his hearers and readers.

5. He should use words which are likely to be understood. Ornament and amplification will come spontaneously in due time, but he should never seek them.

6. He must creep before he can fly, by which I mean that humility, which is a great Christian virtue, has a place in literary composition.

7. He who is ambitious will never write well, but he who tries to say simply what he means, what religion demands, what faith teaches, what the Gospel promises, will be eloquent without intending it and will write better English than if he made a study of English literature.

You would do well to write these words on the tablet of your hearts and continually to ponder them. You may perchance thereby be one day worthy the name of a preacher. And Newman would have told you that that is fairer renown than to be a writer of books.

2

I should fail in duty if I did not take opportunity to remind you that because your task requires of you the use of language in public a peculiar responsibility rests upon you for the maintenance of the purity and worth of language. It is a Christian duty to be well-spoken at all times; but in the pulpit, it is an article of holiness.

What is the office of language? It is in its own sphere precisely the office of money in commerce. It is the currency of social intercourse. Words are the coins with which the mind of one man does business with the mind of another. Just as a dollar bill or a coin is a means by which we convey economic value, so language is the

means by which we convey thought and feeling. Because this spiritual commerce —the commerce of mind and heart—is the most important thing in life, it is essential that the currency should not be debased. It is every man's business, it is supremely the business of those who write and of those who speak in public, to preserve the purity and dignity of language, the integrity and worth of words, for you cannot debase the currency of social intercourse without eventually corrupting life itself.

And this particular currency is peculiarly exposed to depreciation. Words, precisely because they are so plastic, suffer sorely from slack and slovenly usage, both in speech and in writing. Take as a single instance the habit of strong language (strong, that is, not in the sense of profane but of excessive language) on occasions which do not call for it. Many words used in this fashion have ceased by now to have any meaning. It is frequently said that this or that or the other is "awfully nice," which if it means anything means that it is so nice that it strikes you with awe—which is non-

sense. In consequence, the word "awful" has lost its point and we have to find another word to describe what is actually awe-full. The same thing is happening to other words: dreadful, tremendous, immense, wonderful, terrible, infinite, and many more are generally used in reduced meanings and are rapidly becoming almost vain for their original use. With this there comes a general lowering of the level of speech. Ordinary language grows pale and anæmic because we are so prone to use lurid speech for ordinary things; and we are left without language to describe extraordinary things. Preachers are sometimes tempted to illicit hyperbole and other rhetorical excesses. It is well to bear in mind that economy of speech is the first condition of wealth of speech. Here, as elsewhere, it is a narrow way that leads to life.

Even if we did no more in the pulpit than maintain the currency of speech at its par value, we should be rendering the community a public and social service of the first importance. To give the example of precise, simple, comely, and gracious speech

is in itself a spiritual ministry. It is Alice Meynell who says that "right language enlarges the soul as no other power or influence may do"; and the word is true and worthy of all acceptation. It is a part of the obligation of honor which we assume when we presume to preach to men that the speech which we use shall be pure and undefiled.

And that requires from us a reverence for *words*. For this we have august sanction. Did not Jesus once say, "Every idle [that is, every light, meaningless, thoughtless, pointless] word that men speak, they shall give account thereof at the day of judgment"? Evidently, Jesus thought that words should be used sparingly, not because he despised them but because he respected them. Some people profess a contempt of words, insisting on their inferiority to deeds (though it should be noticed that in order to utter their contempt of words they must use words). But this is sheer muddle-headedness. A word may be a deed and the mother of deeds. "The mind of man," says Sir Walter Raleigh, "is peopled, like some

silent city, with a sleeping company of reminiscences, associations, impressions, attitudes, emotions to be awakened into fierce activity at the touch of words." Emily Dickinson had a fine sense of the responsibility which goes with a word:

> "Could mortal lip divine
> The undeveloped freight
> Of a delivered syllable,
> 'Twould crumble with the weight."

And she herself furnishes an instance of the magic that may hide in words. In one of her letters she writes, "'We conquered, but Bozzaris fell.' That sentence always chokes me." We have all met words that choke us. A word is not only a set of symbols or of sounds; it may on occasion be a peal of thunder or a high explosive. It may perchance be the summons of destiny or the death sentence of hope. I could tell you of a man whose habit of life was reversed in the twinkling of an eye by reading this sentence of Thoreau's: "You cannot kill time without injuring eternity." Times without number in the history of our race

a careless word has started a train of tragic events. Words have unseated dynasties and wrought revolution, have broken hearts, and laid lives in ruin. Yet words have also a virtue of healing; they may evoke noble dreams, inspire high purpose, and provoke to gallant adventure. Words are things to be handled reverently, discreetly and in the fear of God. It was said of Robert Louis Stevenson that he pondered words long and lovingly; and we might do worse, for every word spoken by a son of man is a two-edged sword. The difference between the right use of a word and the wrong use may in the event be precisely the difference between heaven and hell.

3

Did you observe in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter that Owen Felltham says he likes words "expressively significant, that lead the mind to something besides the naked term"? Words are plastic and malleable things that change their aspect with the company they keep; and it depends on their company how much they

lead the mind beyond the naked term. Alice Maynell, in one of her essays, tells us how Rossi, the Italian actor, once played *King Lear* in Italian in London. But there was one phrase which would not by any means go into Italian—"Every inch a king." So Rossi said "every inch" in English. "It needed Shakespeare's word to vindicate Shakespeare's royalism. (One might make sport of any kind of translation: say 'Ogni centimetro'—'Every centimeter a king' is good farce.) No Italian will serve: the Latin mind has not this degree of imaginative reverence, nor has the Italian language the faculty of giving sudden greatness to a customary word."

Now, this takes us from words to the ordering of words. A word is nothing without its context. It may be less than nothing in an improper context. Its power may be enhanced a hundred-fold when it becomes obviously the right word in the right place. This starts a question that cannot be justly considered in a paragraph or so. I will not attempt it, preferring, rather, to suggest that you pursue the matter yourself

in, say, Herbert Read's *English Prose Style* or Sir Walter Raleigh's essay on *Style* or Quiller-Couch's *Art of Writing*. There are, however, some immediate matters of consequence upon which you will allow me a few words.

Mr. Augustine Birrell, being asked some little time ago how much eloquence was to be heard in the British House of Commons, replied that there was none. "What the House wants," he added, "is the just word, the clean phrase and no frills." I suggest that there is here a word of wisdom for us, especially in the middle term. I am not speaking without my book when I declare to you that the pulpits of the English-speaking countries, and I will add, especially those on this side of the Atlantic Ocean, inflict an appalling quantity of slovenly and disjointed English upon the long-suffering pews every Sunday of the year. This is no doubt partly due to slack and foggy thinking, but I am inclined to think that it arises chiefly from impatience or indolence or haste. Surely, the matters committed to us are of so great consequence that we should

spend time and pains in the effort to state them precisely, lucidly, and comprehensively. It is not to be expected nor will it be found in a sermon dashed off in half a morning; neither will it be found—a few exceptional persons apart—in a sermon of which the preparation has consisted in little more than putting a few notes on a sheet of paper. If it be complained that there is too little time in the modern minister's life to take these pains, then I answer without hesitation that some activities should be set on one side in order that there may be time. Four morning hours daily in a study with locked doors is the very least that should be offered to a task so momentous. And that is too little.

There are, however, certain common bad habits in the use of English which it should be no trouble to avoid. Did you notice that in a passage I quoted from Lord Haldane's *Autobiography* he had written, "My answer was in the negative"? What he meant was, "I said No." And that was no doubt what he actually said. Of course, he was in writing reproducing the standard form

in which questions are answered in the House of Commons. Why should he have used that clumsy periphrasis in his book? We all do that kind of thing in our turn. Quiller-Couch calls it *jargon;* and he delivered an amusing lecture on it. "Has a minister to say 'No' in the House of Commons? Some men are constitutionally incapable of saying No, but the Minister conveys it thus, 'The answer to the question is in the negative.' That means No. Can you discover it to mean anything less or anything more than that the speaker is a pompous person?—which was no part of the information demanded." He goes on to show how the misuse of the words "case," "instance," "character," "nature," "condition," "persuasion," "degree," has brought about a loose and sloppy habit of speech; and I venture to reproduce here by way of illustration some examples of this degenerate language. "He was conveyed to his residence in an intoxicated condition" is only an inflated way of saying "He was carried home drunk." "Mr. —— exhibiting less than five works, all of a superior quality,

figures prominently in the oil section"—a sentence written (though you might not suspect it) by an art critic! You could easily find a bushel of similar monstrosities in your morning paper, and it is a genuine misfortune that we do not feel them to be monstrous. This way of writing does at the best no more than add a spurious importance to a trivial event or an aspect of gentility to a raw fact, and in doing so, it blunts the fine edge of both the written and the spoken word. The height—or, rather, the depth—of this degenerate fashion of speech is, as you are well aware, reached in the sporting and athletic columns of the newspapers.

There are other "bad manners" in the use of English that one might dwell on with advantage. But happily for me the work has been ably done once for all for this generation Let me strongly counsel you to purchase a book the title of which is *A Dictionary of Modern English Usage,* by H. W. Fowler, who does full justice to the peculiarities of English usage on both sides of the Atlantic. He has no brief

for any particular tradition or school of English usage; his concern is with the wide and universal tradition of living English speech. Such problems as the split infinitive, the position of the preposition, the use of the subjunctive, "shall" and "will," "either" and "neither" are treated with sanity and humor. One of the most useful features in the book is a number of short articles upon various abuses and corruptions of speech. Some of the headings are: "Battered Ornaments," "Barbarisms," "Facetious Formations," "Genteelism," "Hackneyed Phrases," "Unequal Yokefellows," "Wornout Humor"; and I am free to say that there is no better safeguard against bad writing or bad speaking than a mastery of these terse and witty essays. Mr. Fowler has this to say of "Genteelisms": "By *genteelism* is here to be understood the substituting for the ordinary natural word that first suggests itself to the mind of a synonym that is thought to be less soiled by the lips of the common herd, less familiar, less plebeian, less vulgar, less improper, less apt to come unhandsomely betwixt the wind and

our nobility. The truly genteel invite one to *step,* not *come,* this way; take in not *lodgers,* but *paying guests;* send their boys not to *school,* but to *college;* never *help,* but *assist,* each other to potatoes; keep *stomachs* and *domestics* instead of *bellies* and *servants;* and have quite forgotten that they could ever have been guilty of *toothpowder* and *napkins* and *underclothing,* of *before* and *except* and *about,* where nothing now will do for them but *dentifrice, serviette, lingerie, ere, save, anent.*"[19] And then he adds an alphabetical list of words that come under this criticism. If you are minded to make your speech worthy of your subject matter, you can scarcely afford to do without this book, and I promise you much diversion in the study of it. The degradation of English speech with which we are surrounded daily in the public prints does affect us without being aware of it. There is a Gresham's Law in language as there is in finance. A base currency will drive out the good. And it is well that we should fortify ourselves against the debasement of our own language; for it is safe to declare

that you cannot preach the word of God in a debased speech.

If I were a teacher of homiletics, I should, I think, during the first year of a man's course, do little but require him to write short homilies of say seven hundred and fifty to one thousand words, of which, however, not more than five per cent should be words of more than two syllables. This would, I imagine, be found a drastic discipline, but it would be sound policy. I would justify this course simply on the ground that the foundation of good English lies in a mastery of the purely English basis of English speech. Most polysyllabic words in English are borrowings or adoptions from other languages, both ancient and modern; and they tend to make our diction cumbersome. Take for instance, this sentence, which I came upon in a theological article the other day: "I have carefully gone over the passages which are used in support of the earthly Jewish program involved in an affirmative answer to the question under consideration." No man should be allowed to write a sentence like

that; and if the writer of it had had a discipline in the writing of simple English, he would have been incapable of writing it. But however cosmopolitan in its sources the English dictionary may be, English syntax remains English to the core. And it is only by writing in words of one and two syllables that you learn the main elements of the underlying structure of the language and become expert in the writing of direct and sinewy English. I am not one of those purists who clamor for a return to the Anglo-Saxon elements of English and would ban all foreign invasions of the language. But I would have all those who use the English language in public, whether in pulpit or in print, able to introduce the necessary polysyllables without becoming woolly and obscure. There is an English groundwork for English speech and English writing, which must be respected if the English is to be worthy of hearing or of reading; and I know of no way by which this groundwork can be thoroughly laid down, other than by sustained practice in English diction of the simplest kind. When

you can wield your sling with confidence, you can use whatever stones you choose; though it is likely that you will, by then, have learned to exercise a nice discrimination in the choice of your stones. A good deal of the ineffectualness of our preaching springs from the turgidity and the cloudiness that grows out of sheer incompetency in handling the primary elements of English syntax.

I am not arguing that a man should acquire skill in writing and speaking good English merely as an end in itself, for speech itself is but a means to an end. It is possible to attain to a technical efficiency, to a pedantic straight-lacedness in speaking and writing that defeats itself. It is our business to speak so as to persuade and to impress; and of that, the first condition is that we shall be immediately intelligible. If your diction is turbid and obscure, you would do well to hold your peace: you only bewilder minds already sufficiently bewildered. And never be afraid that simple speech cannot call out the effects that preaching is meant to call out. You have

only to read the Gospels to be absolutely sure of that.

So far I have had in mind the need of achieving a mastery of the elements of English speech with reference only to its structure; but that is only one element in our problem. We have also to think of it in relation to its subject matter; and it is therefore necessary not only to discipline ourselves to simplicity but also to *precision* of speech. We must aim, so far as in us lies, to clothe thought in the aptest possible language so that it is conveyed clearly and exactly to the mind of a hearer. This is not quite the same thing as simplicity of speech. It is possible to make a fetish of simplicity, and by oversimplification to make your thought thin or hazy. But to be both simple and precise—which should be our constant aim—is not an easy accomplishment. It requires a good deal of travail. You may find yourself having to write a sentence over and over again before it entirely satisfies you. When Dr. Alexander Whyte was in his seventieth year, he wrote in a letter to one of his children: "I wrote my last forenoon

sermon three times over. And that is the only thing in which I resemble Newman. He wrote *all* his sermons as often as I wrote mine last week."[20] It would, I imagine, be found that the great preachers have habitually perfected their sermons in that way; and it is worth all the time and all the labor one expends upon it to be able to put his whole mind fully and plainly in a form of fitting and well-ordered language. To precision of speech there is no royal road. It is wholly an affair of practice and self-discipline.

Yet here let me warn you against supposing that you can ever quite successfully capture into speech the whole *matter* of your preaching. There is in religion a margin of experience that eludes expression in speech. It "breaks through language and escapes." I suppose that every serious preacher is some time or other charged with preaching over his hearers' heads. But he need not be greatly disturbed by the charge —unless, indeed, he has foolishly lapsed into unintelligibility by using the technical jargon of the specialists or by mere rhetorical

wordiness. He will do well, in that event, to go home and examine himself. But to the charge of preaching over peoples' heads he may properly reply that he is much of the time preaching over his own head. For if a preacher is not often preaching over his own head, whatever else he may be doing, he is not preaching religion. It is of the very nature of religion that its reach outruns our human faculty of expression even if not our human faculty of experience. After all, language, as Bergson tells us, was devised for the conduct of life within the framework of time and space; and it has no competency for dealing with the transcendent realities of religion. The poet by his magic comes nearer the unattainable in speech than the rest of us, whose minds normally move along the flat; and happy is the preacher who is born with a poetic gift! But the rest of us have to be satisfied with the clumsy effort, putting what strain on language we may, in order to say the unsayable thing. Turn to your Paul; and see how he stretched language almost to breaking point in order to tell

those things which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." You have no doubt observed that the words which we commonly use to describe the ultimate realities with which we have to do, tell not what they are but what they are not—infinite, eternal (by which we ordinarily mean timeless), invisible, immortal, and so forth. No matter how hard we try, we fall short. There are no words for the final things.

But let me add here, by way of compensation, that we are not finally dependent on words. After all, it is our business to transmit to men the *word of God*. I am not going now into the history of this expression, but I would remind you that it is a word which is no word. Mark Rutherford in a comment on the expression, "The Word became flesh" exclaims, "How well that it did not become a book!" We know what he means; at the same time we know that the word can be found in a book and can be heard in a sermon. It is, as I said, no

word, as we know words. It is the touch of God on a man's spirit, bringing according to his need, the call of God, the comfort of God, the rebuke of God, the grace of God. Though this is no word of man, it is by the word of man that it is most commonly conveyed. When you have heard it in a sermon, it is not immediately in what the preacher has said but in some unearthly undertone which went with a word, in the inward echo that was evoked by a phrase; it was something that set the bells ringing in the heart. You may hear it between the lines of a poem; or it may be borne on a stave of music; it may be read in a crimson sunset; Brother Lawrence, you remember, discovered it in a leafless tree in winter time. But it is chiefly to be heard in the voice of prophecy. In this sense we may speak of preaching as a sacrament; it is specifically, the Sacrament of the Word.

But if our preaching is to convey the Word, it is certain that our preaching must be the best possible, not in its matter only, but also in its outward manner. Indeed, only the best speech is worthy to convey

that ultimate unspeakable Word; and it is not vouchsafed to the man who does not take the craft of his preaching seriously. Dr. Alexander Whyte once wrote to a former assistant of his who was entering upon a charge of his own: "I pray that you may have a happy day; and may both get good and do good. And that it may be so—will you take a word from an old pulpit hand? Your sermon has been long ready; but be up earlier than usual to meditate and pray over it. Steep every sentence of it in the Spirit. . . . Preach as if it were your last sermon; and your first will be memorable, both to you and to the people. And throw all you are into it, into the *delivery* of it. I am not afraid for its matter or its language, but I am not without some fear as to its delivery. . . Do not despise delivery, falling back upon matter. The matter is dead without delivery. Delivery! Delivery! Delivery! said Demosthenes to the aspirant. You able fellows are tempted to despise delivery as being "popular." I implore you to rise above that delusion; and to do your very best by your message by

delivering in your best possible." I quote this passage because it was written by a preacher than whom no man within living memory has uttered the quickening and saving Word of God more effectually and to more souls of men. He won that immortal garland because, while he cared jealously for his own inner life, he was also careful not only of the matter, but of the language and delivery of his sermons. And you may read in his *Biography* how he had steeped himself in the riches of English prose. In the early eighties he wrote to a friend, "I cannot write good English but I flatter myself I know it when I see it." Twenty years later he again avowed that he fell short of his ideal as a writer of English, but added, "A good style, especially in sacred composition, is one of the purest delectations of my daily life." And one day at table in his home he said: "Style!—it's the march of language. It's the way one word is married to another, the way the words lean upon one another, the way they walk together. Style is the wings of a book that carry it down from generation to gen-

eration." And his biographer says with justice that "the reader of Doctor Whyte's sermons will find proof on every page of the way in which the writer's pen was disciplined to the preacher's task." I commend to you, that last word and beseech you to inscribe it on the tablets of your memory: *The writer's pen was disciplined to the preacher's task.*

5

Mr. Augustine Birrell, in his description of good House of Commons speech in these days, said that it had "no frills." The House of Commons meets for the transaction of business; and I take it that nowadays it does without frills of speech because it has no time for them, and public business is best discussed in plain speech. But there are occasions even in that august assembly when speech takes wings and leaves the earth. There can be no regular assemblage of human beings without its emotional moments; and emotion changes the character of speech. I think it no bad thing that the age of eloquence and oratory has passed;

and that the appeal to intelligence has superseded the appeal to emotion. It is indeed no small gift to be able to stir the multitude by moving speech, but its danger is that it may induce the hearer to substitute feeling for thought. There is still enough in us of the herd instinct to put us in peril of being swept off our feet and to take leave of thought altogether under the spell of the orator. In religion, there are unavoidable emotional moments; indeed, it is our business as preachers to evoke such moments. But we should be careful not to evoke emotion so far as to suspend or to paralyze intelligence. I once saw a play which had a religious motive and a religious appeal; but the appeal advanced behind a barrage of emotional incident that disabled the intelligence from receiving it on its own merit; and I have listened to sermons that seemed to me to defeat themselves in the same way. Not that emotion should not be present; it must, indeed, be present; but that it should be ridden with a firm rein.

Upon this subject I wish to make two observations. First, that when you allow

emotion to get the better of intelligence, you land yourself in the messy puddle of sentimentality; and in consequence, your language becomes saccharine and sticky. Instead of the crisp and direct speech which your business requires, you decline to speech that may be sonorous enough, but is vague and woolly, and produces no other effect than that of titillating the sensibilities of your hearers. That may make you a popular preacher, for the prevailing fashion of education has produced an uncritical generation which confounds sentimentality with beauty, and even, as I have observed, confounds it with spirituality. But it does not follow that you are a preacher because you are a popular preacher. For it is one thing to speak the word of God to men and quite another to tickle their ears. There is a rather terrible passage in Ezekiel which a preacher should frequently ponder: "As for thee, son of man, the children of thy people talk of thee by the walls and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the

word that cometh forth from Jehovah. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but do them not: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their gain. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument." He gave, you see, a fine and attractive performance. But that is not preaching.

The second observation I would make is that the perilous presence of emotion in all public religious discourse leads to the preacher's temptation to raise the pitch of his language and to indulge in purple patches. It is common counsel to young writers that when they have written a composition, they should go over it and put their pens through the passages that seem to them to be "fine writing." That counsel obeyed makes a heroic self-discipline; but it is undoubtedly good advice. I think that the preacher should in the same way expunge his "purple patches." He ought not to lay himself out to compose rich and

sonorous passages; for such passages have in them less of emotion than of sound and are therefore essentially false. If the root of the matter is in him, the emotional content of his own religious experience should be able to determine the diction which the occasion requires; and it undoubtedly will. Beyond that, the preacher should not permit himself to go. For exaggeration of language beyond the measure of his own emotion involves a failure in truthfulness. It may give him a reputation for eloquence, but he misses the point of his preaching. If we devote ourselves to simplicity and precision of speech, we may leave the rest to look after itself. Our subject matter should furnish us with all the eloquence we need; and while we should not be so Spartan as to eschew all ornament, let us not forget that our chief ornament is our gospel itself. Though I have been commending to you the study of great secular literature, permit me to warn you against the danger of overloading sermons with literary quotation and allusion. When such things offer themselves to us spontaneously

and fittingly, we are foolish if we refuse their help. But it is quite another matter to punctuate a sermon with them. Instead of doing what you should in preaching do, you deflect attention to your own erudition and wide reading; and that is not worth doing. I confess that at no time have I been more mortified than on the occasions —very few, I am glad to say—when, after preaching a sermon, I have been thanked for a "literary treat." We are not in the pulpit to give literary treats or any other kind of treat. Do you remember the lines that Frederic W. H. Myers put on Saint Paul's lips?

"Only as souls I see the folk thereunder
Bound who should conquer, slaves who should be kings
Hearing their one hope with an empty wonder
Sadly contented with a show of things—

"Then with a thrill the intolerable craving
Shivers through me like a trumpet call,
Oh, to save these to perish for their saving
Die for their life, be offered for them all!"[21]

That I take to be the essential temper of the preacher. We interpret the word

"save" more broadly than our fathers did; but the "passion for souls" is still the mainspring of true preaching. If the preacher is in these latter days under something of a cloud, it is chiefly because he has not risen to the height of his calling; and none but he can restore it to its place of necessity and honor. And he will do it only by taking pains with every element of his preaching office. Here I have only endeavored to persuade you to the enterprise of steeping your minds in the great humanizing tradition of English letters and to plead with you to labor in fashioning an utterance which is adequate to and worthy of the great things that you are commissioned to utter. I need not remind you that there are other matters beside these.

And of these latter the most important is the cultivation of your own inner life Of this I have had very little to say in these lectures; for it was not in the bond. But I may advert briefly to the subject even under cover of literature. For I may remind you that some of the most valuable aids to the nurture of the inner life stand

among the notable achievements of English literature. It would be difficult for me to tell how much Frederick W. H. Myers' great poem "Saint Paul," from which I have just quoted, has meant to my spirit for a quarter of a century and more. That is only one and a recent instance of the rich provender that awaits the soul in English devotional literature. This literature begins with Richard Rolle, of Hampole, who was born in the thirteenth century, and who wrote in Latin *The Fire of Love* and *The Mending of Life,* which were translated into English by Richard Mysin in the fifteenth century. There are besides: Walter Hilton, the unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing,* and Juliana of Norwich, who lived in the early fifteenth century and left us her *Revelations of Divine Love.* All these are classics of the devotional life; and the English in which they are written is a demonstration of how much of the deep things of God will go into simple speech. I need not again remind you of the mystical poets: Crashaw, Donne, Herbert and Henry Vaughan—a fine suc-

cession well worth study; and in prose we have such works as Law's *Serious Call,* Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living,* and much beside. The most notable of all English devotional works in prose is *Centuries of Meditation* by Thomas Traherne—who was also no mean poet and whose poems are available—a Welsh country parson of the seventeenth century, whose work had been lost and then was unexpectedly rediscovered and given to the world in 1908. You would do well to make yourselves familiar with these, both for the sake of your soul and for that of your diction. Alice Meynell, reflecting upon our slovenly ways with ordinary grammar, reminds us that "we have the treasure of the sequestered poetic and religious language in good order and perfect syntax," "a unique plot of disregarded language that the traffic of the world passes by." The reason for this is not far to seek. It is due to the influence of the Authorized Version of the Bible, and then at some little distance, of the Book of Common Prayer.

I wonder whether you know the passage

in which Thomas Carlyle speaks of preachers: "That a man stand there and speak of spiritual things to men. It is beautiful; even in its great obscuration and decadence it is among the beautifullest, most touching objects one sees on the earth. This speaking one has in these times wandered terribly from the point; has alas! as it were, totally lost sight of the point; yet at bottom whom have we to compare with him? Of all public functionaries boarded and lodged on the industry of Modern Europe, is there one worthier of the board he has? A man professing and never so languidly making still some endeavor to save the souls of men. Contrast him with a man professing to do little but shoot the partridges of men. I wish he could find the point again, this speaking one; and stick to it with tenacity, with deadly energy; for there is need of him yet. The Speaking Function, this of truth coming to us in a living voice, this with all our Writing and Printing Functions, has a perennial place. Could he but find the point again. . . ." This was written in 1840; and ninety years

have not robbed it of its force. Here is, I think, the answer to those critics who foresee the disappearance of preaching. I, on the contrary, would venture to predict a revival of preaching, could we, as Carlyle says, but find the point again. We may not agree with Carlyle in our judgment upon what the point is; but it is pretty clear that we have lost it. The trumpet has these many days been speaking with an uncertain voice—and no wonder. For nowadays the preacher is become a sort of man-of-all-work to the community, a useful public functionary and committee man, an organizer and administrator of ecclesiastical machinery, a Jack-of-all-trades and master least of his own. We need to recover the habit of the desert place apart, where we may hear for ourselves the word of the Lord, and the word can work itself into the very stuff of our life. It is our supreme duty to be sedulous and faithful in the culture of our inner life, in those disciplines that keep the mind informed, the reason supple, the imagination lively, the taste pure and sound, the intuitions swift and

steady, in the study of the Bible that will weave its living substance into the texture of our thought; and withal, in the indispensable disciplines of meditation and prayer. Then we shall find the point again and preach it so that men will be constrained to hear; and there may be yet such preachers as he of whom Frederic W. H. Myers wrote:

"Is there one man in disenchanted days
Who yet has feet on earth and head in heaven?
One viceroy yet to whom his King has given
The fire that kindles and the strength that sways?

. . . . . .

"We are barren; let a male and conquering voice
Fill us and quicken us and make rejoice
Even us who have so long forgotten joy?

"And as I prayed, I heard him; harshly clear,
Through the full house, the loud vibration ran,
And in my soul responded the austere
And silent sympathy of man with man;
For as he spake, I knew that God was near,
Perfecting still the immemorial plan,
And once in Jewry, and for ever here
Loves as he loved and ends what he began."

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